

A SHORT HISTORY OF COLNBROOK

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Village Origins

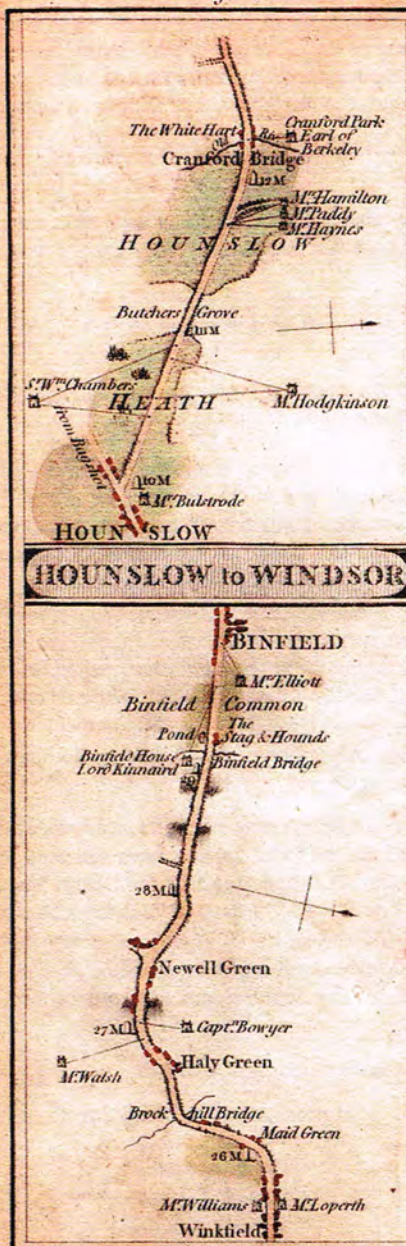
Nine hundred years ago Colnbrook was little more than a cluster of houses close to the Colne Brook, a riverside settlement that owed its existence to a safe crossing of the marshy Colne valley with its numerous brooks and streams. No records survive to tell the story of the origins of this riverside settlement, but the fact that for so many centuries Colnbrook straddled the boundary between Middlesex and Buckinghamshire and the parish boundaries of Horton, Iver, Langley and Stanwell, hints at deliberate planning. How important these boundaries were and why? and by whom it was decided to cross the Colne Valley at this place? are questions that we can never answer. On the other hand we can be reasonably sure that road and crossing were of vital importance to the origins of Colnbrook, its growth and subsequent history.

The earliest mention of Colnbrook in surviving documents is dated 1106. It records the gift of an hospitium [an inn or guest house] from Miles Crispin, Lord of Wallingford Castle and the Manor of Iver, to Abingdon Abbey. Its Abbot, Faricus, was a physician and had cared for Miles during his last illness. The abbey chronicle faithfully records the details of the gift, and the hospitium is mentioned again in 1189, but no later reference to the property has survived, and sometime before the dissolution of the abbey, some four hundred years later, the abbey ceased to own it

The twelfth century saw the development of the great medieval highway that later generations would know as the Bath Road and eventually the A4. The highway was not built, but made by the traffic which used it, and in all probability it took decades before it was thought of as a continuous road linking London and Westminster to Bristol, the country's greatest port after London itself. As the road grew in importance, so did Colnbrook. Its location as a wayside village at the crossing of the Colne earned it a place on the Gough Map, the earliest known official road map of Britain, drawn about 1360.

Merchants and monks, packmen and pilgrims, the king and his household - the road was never empty. Contemporary documents are sprinkled with mentions of travellers, many of whom must have passed through Colnbrook and made use of its inns, though only a few have left record of their journey. In 1264, after the Battle of Evesham, a deputation of citizens of London met Sir Roger Leybourne, one of Henry III's knights, at Colnbrook. In 1337 four of the King of France's ambassadors visited Edward III at Windsor Castle. They dined with the king in his chamber and afterwards 'departed and lay (stayed) the same night at Colnbrook and in the next day at London'. Almost certainly it was the number and quality of the inns that gave Colnbrook its importance, but surviving records give us the name of only one medieval inn in Colnbrook - the Catherine Wheel. It is mentioned in the will of Thomas Windsor, dated 1479. Henry VIII is reputed to have stayed there in 1516.

Colnbrook was still physically divided between two counties and four parishes, as well as five manors (Poyle was a separate manor within the parish of Stanwell), its inhabitants subject to the jurisdiction and government of the various civic and ecclesiastical authorities according to where they lived in the village. But, as with other similar divided villages, the residents developed a strong sense of their own community and in 1342 they got their own place of worship. Dedicated to St Mary, the little chapel stood in the centre of the village on the north side of the High Street. It was thus in the Parish of Langley, but at this date it probably had its own priest since it was endowed by a Thomas Purchacour as a chantry chapel. It was he who had obtained the necessary licence from the bishop.



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NEW PRIVILEGES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

In the 1530s John Leland, the King's Antiquary, made a series of journeys by which he travelled along the main roads in all parts of the country, making notes of the features he found 'memorable or curious'. Bridges, fords and ferries were of prime importance to any traveller and his description of the road to Colnbrook is dominated by his consideration of the terrain over which it traversed:

A little beyond Langford Bridge is a bridge of wood, under which the principle stream of the Colne River runnith, ...

From this bridge to Colebrok bridge of timber about a mile. All the ground from a mile or more at this side of Langford to Colebrok bridge is all low pasture, and at rages of rain by rising of the river much overflowen.

Under Colebrok bridge of timber runneth the second of the two principal arms of the Cole river.

The town of Colebrok is set on each side of the river of Colne, but the greater part of it is on the west side of the river; there is a chapel of brick made of late days.

The state of the roads and bridges was not just a local problem. Trade and travel was on the increase and during the Tudor period the Bristol road became one of the country's great post roads. In 1555, during the reign of Queen Mary Tudor, a law was passed which made each parish responsible for the maintenance of its roads. The responsibility for the stretch of road through Colnbrook, however, had already been laid upon the inhabitants of Colnbrook some twelve years earlier. In 1544 Henry VIII had granted the village a charter, raising its status to that of a borough, and bestowing on the town the privileges of holding a weekly market on Tuesdays, two annual fairs, and the right to hold a court of pie poudre to dispense summary justice on fair days. The inhabitants should be a town corporate and could have a common seal for transacting the town affairs; all profits from such markets, fairs and courts would belong to the town. Such privileges, however did not come for free, and in return, the new town of Colnbrook became responsible for the repair, building and maintenance of three bridges and the road through the town.

Little is known about how the new borough managed its affairs for none of its early records have survived. But Tudor Colnbrook was a prosperous small market town. Its inns were still used by the great and famous; Princess Elizabeth (later Queen Elizabeth I) slept one night at the George Inn when she was being escorted from Woodstock to Hampton Court. By 1577 there were at least 10 inns, as well as numerous alehouses. It is a telling reminder of Colnbrook's importance as a thoroughfare town, and a crude measure of its relative importance. Slough, as yet only a small village, had no inns, only three alehouses. Maidenhead, another thoroughfare town with bridges to maintain, had only three inns, one tavern and six alehouses.

1577 innkeepers in the Buckinghamshire part of Colnbrook:

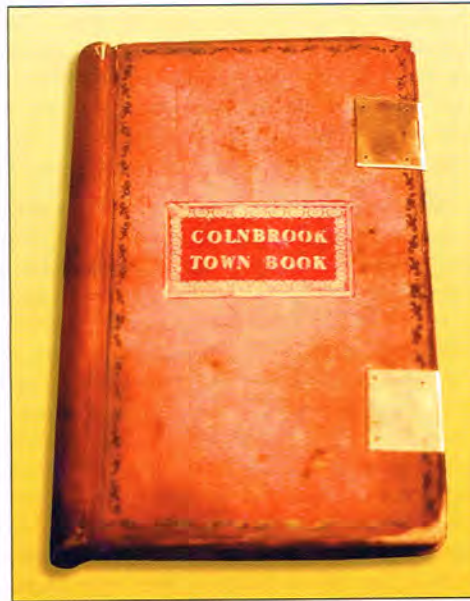
Langley side of the High Street
William Higgins
William Marchame
Richard Bonar
John Jarman

Horton side of the High Street
Thomas Wiche
Richard Hethe
Richard Layforde
Thomas Langley

The government return from which the names are taken gives no inn signs, but later records suggest that William Higgins and Thomas Langley may well have been the innkeepers of the George and the Ostrich respectively. In 1595 William Higgins was in dispute with the butchers who sold their meat in the weekly market. It had become the custom for them to set up their market stalls right

outside the George Inn, blocking the way of the inn customers. Eventually Higgins took the matter to the Court of Exchequer - an expensive affair, but he won his case.

The earliest surviving record of the town administration is the first Town Book beginning with the accounts of 1612. Rather surprisingly, the Book does not include record of any meetings of the borough council, but consists mainly of the accounts of two annually appointed chapel wardens. Chapel affairs had been no part of the charter conditions, but in 1547, under the protestant policies of Edward VI, chantries had been suppressed and St Mary's lost its endowment. The care of the chapel now became a town matter. The borough also took on various other responsibilities and the accounts record payments for the conveyance of prisoners, management of several charities, the 'placing' of poor children, and the carriage of cripples. A 'cripple house' was built on Hermitage Green in 1625. The repair and maintenance of the bridges, causeways and road were also, of course, the business of the wardens, and two surveyors of the highway were appointed each year. The only other borough officers listed regularly were the



four collectors for the poor who were responsible for collecting the poor rates for the parts of Colnbrook in Langley and Horton. There may also have been two constables and two deputies (headboroughs) though these are only mentioned once when David Salter presented painted staves, with 'brazen heads', to the borough in 1626. One can only wonder in what ceremony the staves were carried. The borough income consisted of the profits from the markets and fairs, and rent from borough property.

In 1635 Charles II granted Colnbrook a second charter. It is frequently suggested that this grant implies that the responsibilities and privileges of the earlier one had been allowed to lapse, but this is not necessarily so. Most chartered boroughs have several charters, confirming and adding to their privileges. The new charter confirmed the old privileges and responsibilities, and granted that the town should be a corporation of the inhabitants with a common council of twelve burgesses, one of whom should be the bailiff. The council could appoint a council house, acquire property, have its own seal, and make bye-laws. A steward who was learned in the law was to be appointed and he and the current bailiff were to be justices of the peace with civil and judicial authority. The town boundaries were also defined.

Boundaries as set out in the 1653 Borough Charter

From a bridge called Mad Bridge, in Stanwell on the east of the town, to another bridge called Gray Bridge (now called Lintells Bridge),also in Stanwell on the south of the town ; from there by a certain stream or gutter, called the Allowance, in the Parish of Horton,to a house called the Spittle House on the west of the town, and from there another stream or gutter called the the Shire,on the north of the town, to Mad Bridge.

It would seem that soon after the charter was granted, a town council was indeed established. In 1636 and 1637 letters were sent by the Privy Council to the current bailiffs, ordering them to be 'very careful to suppress drunkenness, punish vagabonds', and to provide houses for those infected with the plague, but there is little other evidence of its existence. These, however, were difficult times. A dreadful plague had decimated Colnbrook and Horton in 1629 and in January 1637 there was fear of another. It was thought that the plague had been brought to the area by papermakers using infected rags. The 'noisome smells of the rags' it was stated, spread an infection that was a danger to His Majesty when he was staying in the district. The chapel wardens ceased to keep accounts and within a few years the town was overtaken by a new disaster – the Civil War.

The proximity of Colnbrook to London and Windsor, the road and the numerous inns, features that had been so important to its prosperity, now became a liability. Throughout the seven years of war, troops were frequently in the neighbourhood and no doubt were often billeted on the inns and alehouses – to the detriment of their trade. Both armies passed through the town on several occasions. In 1642, after the battle at Edgehill, the petition from the Lords and Commons for proposals of peace was presented to the King at Colnbrook. After the battle of Brentford, the King's troops fled through Colnbrook on their way to Oxford, and soon after that Prince Rupert plundered the town and imprisoned all those well-effected to Parliament. Colnbrook residents were no doubt amongst those from local villages who, in 1647, signed a petition of complaint to Parliament about billeting and asked for compensation. Many areas suffered during this period, but whether conditions were much worse in Colnbrook is difficult to assess. However, a memorandum in the Town Book lays some of the blame for the lack of chapel wardens' accounts on the Civil War. Some of the burgesses, it was stated, had left the town, others had died, and because of the 'great troubles' successors had not been chosen. The bailiffs had also 'kept their accounts to themselves', and by 1653 there was neither council nor bailiff and the causeway and bridges were much out of repair.

Eventually two of the surviving burgesses asked Thomas Burcombe to look after the profits from the fairs and markets and in 1655 the town resumed its appointment of chapel wardens. The short period of local government by a town council was over: The chapel wardens were now sometimes called bridge wardens and were nominated at a Vestry, a church rather than civil meeting. For the next seventy years their records are dominated by the accounts - profits and payments - of the three livestock fairs (two extra fairs had been allowed by the second charter), and the repair and maintenance of the road and bridges. By the mid-eighteenth century, however, chapel affairs again predominated. The care of the road, causeway and bridges had passed to other authorities.

Road and bridges

The various bridges over the Colne Brook and other streams were originally wooden and, like those of neighbouring towns, often out of repair. In 1690 the condition of the Colnbrook Bridge was so bad that it became the subject of enquiry at the county Quarter Sessions. For many years past, it was reported, the tolls of the fairs and market had decreased and were now worth very little. They were by no means sufficient to defray the costs of the necessary repairs. It was therefore agreed that a rate should be laid upon all the inhabitants of Colnbrook, 'the whole town being united in one corporation'. In 1731, the bridge was again reported as 'very much out repair' and the following year it was rebuilt in brick - 'there being at present an opportunity of buying bricks and other materials at a cheaper rate than usual' - at the expense of Buckinghamshire county, not the borough. In 1777 the bridge was once again in a very bad state and once again it was rebuilt by the county. Since then it has been repaired numerous times, but the wording on the coping still reminds us of the centuries when Colnbrook straddled the county boundary.



Colnbrook Bridge and Bridge Street

Maintenance of the road was a constant battle against ruts and potholes, mud or dust, according to the season. During 1699 and 1700 the High Street was repaved, and the chapel wardens' accounts are full of payments for loads of stone, flints, gravel and sand. But once again there was insufficient income from the tolls of the fairs and markets, and much of the money had to be raised from subscriptions; William III heading the list of subscribers with a gift of £50. In 1727, however, the maintenance of the road became the responsibility of the newly established Colnbrook Turnpike Trust. It took responsibility for the 14-mile stretch of road from Cranford Bridge to Maidenhead Bridge; the tenth stretch along the Bath Road to be 'turnpiked'. A turnpike gate and toll collector's cottage were erected near the junction with Poyle Road and tolls were collected from travellers passing through, be it on horseback or in a vehicle. In 1741 milestones were erected, the distance measured from Hyde Park Corner, and in 1766 lamps were erected along the High Street. In May 1763 complaint was made about the dust nuisance and the turnpike trust surveyor was ordered to get a water cart in order to dampen the road. However, it was not until 1827 that this job was made easier with the provision of water pumps to fill the carts. The job of gatekeeper was not an easy one; he had to collect tolls and decide who was eligible for exemption, weigh wagons, measure wheels, check the types of goods carried, and count horses and livestock.



Milestone Cottages with Milestone



Milestone

Tolls charged by the Colnbrook Turnpike Trust in 1727

<i>For every coach drawn by:</i>		<i>For every wagon drawn by:</i>	
6 horses	1s	5 horses or oxen	9d
4 horses	6d	4 horses or oxen	6d
1 horse	2d	4 horses or oxen	3d
		1 horse or oxen	2d

During the first hundred years of its existence, the Trust certainly made a great number of improvements, but the major improvements to the road surface did not take place until John McAdam put forward his ideas on road building in the early nineteenth century.

Interwoven with the story of the maintenance of the road and bridge is the history of the traffic that used them. For the residents of Colnbrook, the coaching era almost certainly began in May 1657 when the first stage coach rumbled down the High Street on route for Bath and Bristol. 'God willing', the journey took three days, no doubt with numerous stops. Perhaps one of these was at Colnbrook, but the early advertisements give no details. Over the next two hundred years, the coaching and carrying services improved and multiplied many times. One of the earliest accounts of a stage coach stopping at Colnbrook is a description of a journey to Bath made in 1698 by a party of nine travellers. A three-day coach cost £1 per person, the price of the faster two-day coach being £1 5s (£1.25). Their dinner at one of the Colnbrook inns cost 8s (40p).

There was fierce competition between the rival companies and not all the coaches and wagons stopped at Colnbrook. In 1724 the inhabitants complained to the county magistrates that the 'trade of innkeepers was greatly diminished by reason that the coaches and passengers have now removed to Slough'. Almost certainly it was the new daily coach service provided by Thomas Baldwin, innkeeper of the Crown, that had taken the trade away from Colnbrook. Because of this, they said, they could not raise the £2,325 needed for the repair of St Mary's Chapel because of their poverty, which, they said, was brought about by the loss of trade, the loss of the market and because the river was no longer navigable. The Colne had been used for boat trade between London and Colnbrook in the 1630s, but how long ago it was when it ceased to be navigable is not stated. The residents were given permission to raise funds by appeals!

One set back, however, did not affect the innkeeping and coaching trades for ever and by the mid-eighteenth century, Colnbrook was clearly taking its share of the business, sharing with Cranford Bridge and Slough the position of second stage out of London. A new service from Newbury to London, established in 1752, changed horses at Colnbrook. The advertisement does not mention the name of the Colnbrook inn, but a rival service stopped at the Ostrich. During the eighteenth century, stage coaches were often owned by innkeepers and in 1775, Daniel Gurgerfield of the George Inn was one of five proprietors of the 'Original Bath and Bristol Diligence'. Other Colnbrook inns also catered for stage coaches and nineteenth century directories list the Catherine Wheel, the Star, Green Man and White Hart. In 1836 thirty five coach services were listed as passing through Colnbrook, most of them daily.



Park Street and White Hart

Although stage coaches are often thought of as the most important traffic along the major highways, there were plenty of other vehicles travelling along the Bath Road and using the inns at Colnbrook. Stage wagons called at the George, the Cross, the Crown and the Catherine Wheel. The Gloucester mail coaches called at the George, and from 1813 the Post Office also provided a penny postal service, employing a foot postman to deliver letters to Slough, Salt Hill, Farnham Royal, Stoke Green and Wexham for an extra penny. The White Hart and the George were also posting inns where travellers could hire post horses and postchaise - the hired cars and taxis of the coaching era. Private vehicles also made use of the inns and roads, but perhaps the saddest group of travellers were the poor, individuals and families, who were transported back to their 'place of last legal settlement' according to the Poor Law regulations, because they had fallen on hard times and might become a charge on the rates. During the last four months of 1752, Caesar Willis, constable of Colnbrook, took by horse and cart, an average of twelve families every week across the county, from Colnbrook to Maidenhead - one step on their journeys to places as far away as Wales and Herefordshire. It was a harsh and expensive way of dealing with the very real problems of poverty.

War Office records reveal that during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries Colnbrook was often the stopping place for soldiers marching between London and Windsor. Indeed the practise continued until the troops began using the railway. A useful survey made in 1686 records that Colnbrook inns had 58 beds for guests and stabling for 79 horses. Slough had 10 and 20 respectively and Maidenhead 142 and 259. The Royal Navy was also sometimes seen in Colnbrook. During the Seven Year War, Admiralty records contain references to groups of men being taken to London in charge of a naval lieutenant and his press gang. Most of the new 'recruits' had joined the Navy in Reading, but at least on two occasions in 1760 and 1761, a Reading press gang ventured as far as Colnbrook.

The census taken one day in 1838 at the Colnbrook turnpike gate of the traffic passing both ways through the gate gives an interesting glimpse of the density of traffic at the end of the coaching era:

Public transport	Private transport	Animals to market
Stage coaches 77	mounted saddle horses 78	sheep 740
stage carts 29	phaetons & gigs 95	cattle 110
stage wagons 80	spring carts 52	pigs 75
postchaises 105		

Chapels and Churches

For more than a century, Colnbrook was a centre of non-conformity. According to the rector of Horton, Antipaedo Baptists began meeting in the town during the Civil War, and by 1669 their numbers had risen to fifty. They met in the house of John Lane on the south side of the High Street. There were two teachers, one of whom was Robert Hall, a former chaplain in Cromwell's Army. He became the schoolmaster of Colnbrook's charity school and curate of St Mary's Chapel until the Act of Uniformity of 1662 when he and many hundreds of other clergymen were ejected from the Church of England. As many as thirteen ejected ministers found a new home in Colnbrook, amongst them Robert Franklyn.

Robert Franklyn was a Presbyterian. They had begun meeting in Colnbrook in 1662 and within a few years as many as two hundred people from Colnbrook and other local villages and towns were attracted to their weekly meetings. They were held in a room in the Market House which stood in the market place. These were very difficult times when differences of religion and politics split the country on every level and people were not free to worship as they chose. For preaching in the market place outside the George Inn Robert Franklyn was arrested and sentenced to three months in prison. During this time, the Presbyterian leader was John Slowcombe, a mercer with a shop in Bridge Street, and when it became no longer possible for them to use the Market House, he made a large room above his shop available for their meetings. Quakers were also meeting in Colnbrook in 1669, in the house of Widow Style.

Eventually, the Toleration Act of 1689 brought an end to this persecution and granted freedom of worship for all. In April 1708 a group of thirteen men and women founded another non-conformist church in Colnbrook. They were Particular Baptists and before they held their foundation service they were baptised in the Colne Brook. By the end of May another seventeen new members had joined the church, including the Antipaedo Baptists and the Presbyterians. John Slowcombe's upper room now became their meeting house. The church continued to grow and in 1745, when John's son died and the upper room was no longer available, the church was able to build its own chapel. The land, an orchard behind the Swan Inn, was the gift of Thomas Rayner, a former pupil of the charity school when Anthony How was schoolmaster. The plot of land was large enough for both church and graveyard. The latter was a great boon, for there was no other place for burials in Colnbrook and there was not always harmony when practising non-conformists were buried in Church of England churchyards.

The fortunes of St Mary's Chapel during this period were mixed. Numerous gifts are recorded in the seventeenth century and it was probably rebuilt sometime in that century, the ground floor now acting as the Market House. There were few donations however in the eighteenth century and little income from other sources. The only endowment brought in little money, and there was no surplus income from the market and fairs for the chapel. By the late eighteenth century St Mary's was in a sad state of disrepair. Moreover, the passageway between the chapel and the Chequer Inn was very narrow and accidents occurred when coaches tried to be first through. In 1794 a new chapel was rebuilt on a new site to the east of the Ostrich at the expense of Thomas Fennel of Colnbrook. About this date, the market also appears to have been moved to west end of the town.

The 19th Century: A New Era

Little is known about the government of the borough during the first few decades of the nineteenth century for there are no entries in the first Town Book after 1770, though a reference to James Lawrence as chapel warden in 1833 suggests that the office continued. There is also evidence that they were active in new ways, for in the back of the Town Book there is a memorandum concerning the appointment of trustees and an engineer for the town's fire engine in 1821. By 1831 Colnbrook also had a fire brigade, and although 'newly formed' it was well enough established to hold a rally at Poyle Park. Twenty manual and steam engines took part in the procession, coming from as far afield as Oxford and Wantage. 'The inhabitants of Colnbrook entered into the spirit of the rally, decorated the town and closed their businesses' so that everyone could enjoy the occasion. Other local towns and villages had fire engines or pumps, but Colnbrook seems to be the first place in the local area to have a fire brigade.

The Reform Act of 1832 brought an end to Colnbrook's status as a borough. With a population of under 2,000, it was simply too small to be allowed to continue as a municipal borough. Be that as it may, the people of Colnbrook were determined not to lose all their privileges. A series of meetings were held during 1833. Copies of the charters were obtained and a new Town Book was bought to keep record of meetings, together with a box to hold the two Town Books. It is uncertain by what authority such meetings were held, but meetings of Inhabitants were now held every year, the venue, almost always an inn: the Black Boy, Catherine Wheel, Chequers, Crown, George, Golden Cross, Green Man, Kings Arms, Ostrich, Red Lion, Star and White Hart all took their turn. A town crier gave notice of the date and venue of each public meeting. The most important issue before the meetings was the management of the two surviving livestock fairs, including dealing with the tricky problem of where the fair should held. In 1868 there were over 6,000 sheep, 1,500 cattle and 800 horses for sale at the April fair. The Tuesday market, however, had been discontinued some decades earlier. The meetings also dealt with various charities, and the minutes of the committee in charge of the fire engine are also found in the second Town Book, but the old concerns of church, road and bridge are absent.

The century brought many other changes. A British School for boys and girls was opened in 1832. It was a non-conformist school belonging to the Colnbrook Baptists and the Congregational Church at Poyle. It was run under the principals laid down by the British Schools Society. By the end of its first year it had about 230 pupils, many living in Colnbrook and Horton, but other coming from elsewhere in Buckinghamshire. There were also at least two small private schools, but there was no church school until a National School for boys was built in 1845. The most devastating changes, however, were brought about by the construction the Great West Railway line from London to Bristol.



Entrance to High Street with the Red Lion on left



Ye Old George Hotel

By June 1838 it had reached Slough, by-passing Colnbrook. It reached Bristol in 1841 and within a few years the long distance coaching and carrying trade had deserted the Bath Road. The last mail coach changed horses at the George Inn in April 1841; instead the mail was carried by train to Slough to be sorted. The stream of travellers, the life blood of Colnbrook and other towns along the road, dried up. Some inns, such as the Catherine Wheel, closed, while others struggled to survive. The decrease in road traffic, of course, had a corresponding decrease in the takings at the tollgate, and in 1872 the Trust was wound up.

Colnbrook was no longer a busy thoroughfare town, but must now depend on the trades that are found in most small towns: baker, basket maker, blacksmiths, booksellers, boot and shoe makers, bricklayer, builder, butchers, chimney sweep, corn dealer, drapers, fishmonger, grocers, hairdresser, haberdasher, ironmongers, inns, public houses and beer shops, market gardener and nurseryman, plumber and painter, saddler, tailors, tallow chandler, watchmaker and wood turner, - all were advertised in the 1864 trade directory. There was also mention of the gas works, opened in 1862, the Coln Brewery in Park Street and the Paper Mills at Poyle.

In 1853 Colnbrook changed status once again, when for the first time it became an ecclesiastical parish, with boundaries not so very different from those of the old borough. St Mary's Chapel had already closed and the town had a fine new church. Known as St Thomas', it had been built on its present site north of Mill Street. A vicarage was built just to the north of the churchyard, and in 1862 a National (Church of England) School for infants and girls was built on the same six acre site. A new National School for boys was built in 1898. By that date attendance at school had become compulsory and free.

Since 1830 the Primitive Methodists had also been meeting in Colnbrook, though they did not have a church building until 1850. In 1869 the Baptists decided celebrate the 50th anniversary of their Sunday School by starting a fund to pay for a much needed schoolroom. However, the report on the chapel building proved so bad that it was decided to rebuild the chapel itself, incorporating a schoolroom. The foundation stone was laid in 1871.

Until the mid-nineteenth century there was no meeting room in Colnbrook which was not connected with licensed premises or one of the churches. It was a major step for change when, in 1860, the Public Rooms was opened on the site of the former Black Boy public house. The premises included a meeting room and a reading room. As many as seventy members paid a penny a quarter for the privilege of using its library. Within the year, meetings, which had once taken place at one of the inns, now changed venue to the Public Rooms. No doubt the Rooms made for soberer meetings and opportunities for all sorts of leisure activities, but many of the public houses felt the loss of business.

At long last, after several years of difficult and protracted negotiations, the railway reached Colnbrook in the 1880s when a line was built linking the Great Western Railway at West Drayton with Staines. A station for Colnbrook was built on the east of the village, but business was thin, and freight traffic was slow to develop.

The end of the century brought yet another change in status. Under the 1894 Local Government Act Colnbrook could have been made a civil parish, uniting all four parts of the town. But the opportunity was wasted, and instead the Buckinghamshire part of Colnbrook was transferred to Iver Parish and the Stanwell part of the village remained separate.

The Motor Age

The motor age in Colnbrook can be said to have begun at the end of the nineteenth century with the arrest of Mr Lyons Sampson, who had been waylaid by a police speed trap at Colnbrook and charged for having failed to stop his car when called upon to do so. The incident was the first of its kind, but by no means the last and the war between those who favoured the new 'horseless' vehicles and those who did not, lasted several years. The Automobile Association was much involved and by 1909 their patrolmen were covering the Bath Road as far west as Twyford. The AA also recommended good inns and hotels and the George was listed from 1910 to 1924. For a few years, the George and other public houses also welcomed cyclists and were recommended by the Cyclists Touring Club. In 1912 the London and General Omnibus Company announced it was starting a new Sunday bus service between Hounslow and Windsor, via Colnbrook and Slough. On that first Sunday fifteen motor buses operated a half-hour service all day, conveying 4,377 passengers. The following week the service was extended to cover weekdays as well. The local newspaper headed its report with the words: *Colnbrook in Touch with London by Road Cars*. For a number of years Colnbrook was a stop on the tourist trail to Windsor and the West. Passengers, English, French and American alighted to explore the village and enjoy tea at the Ostrich or the George.

The popularity of these new types of transport – cycle, motor car, steam, trains and omnibuses – brought a new life to Colnbrook, but not all to the liking of the local residents. Accidents were frequent and the dust nuisance was the cause of much complaint; the narrowness of the High Street meant that windows had to be kept shut, even on hot weekends. Some 680 cars were counted passing one lady's house on a Sunday evening in July 1925. All year there had been discussions and reports about a bypass and the following year it was achieved. In 1964, at the start of mass travel overseas and emigration to Canada and Australia, Windsorian Travel made Shirley Lodge its headquarters. Today, perhaps, its most frequent type visitors are a different type of traveller - aeroplane passengers on route for Heathrow.

Meanwhile the use of the Colnbrook branch of the railway had become more important with the building of a munitions factory in 1914. It was the first factory on what was to become the Poyle Trading Estate; Poyle Halt was opened in 1927. During World War II a huge hostel was built on Crown Mead for workers at the munition works and Cottesbrook House became the Headquarters of the Central Depository Section of the RAF. By the 1950s there were more than 70 factories at Poyle and the Poyle Industrial Estate Halt was opened in 1953. By now passenger traffic was also much greater – but not great enough to save the Colnbrook railway station from the Beeching policies and it was closed in 1965. For some years the freight traffic continued, with oil as the main commodity, but that also came to an end in 1981 when the line was severed south of Colnbrook by the M25. This curtailed oil supplies to the depot at Staines. The line to Colnbrook, however, remains open to this day using a single line running under Junction 4/15B of the M4 and M25 motorways. A small oil depot near the old Colnbrook station remained active until quite recently.

Colnbrook had by now become a commuter village, developing a new identity and sense of community. The first crucial step had been taken in 1949 when a crowded public meeting was held in the Public Rooms to discuss Colnbrook's biggest problem – its boundaries. Within a few months the Colnbrook Residents Association had been born, a force that would work for the good of Colnbrook for the rest of the century. However, it would be more than forty years before that matter of boundaries was settled. Prior to this, however, the Stanwell section of Colnbrook was moved from Middlesex to Surrey and in 1993 the latter county repaired the bridge. New boundaries, however, came into force on 1 April 1995 when the whole of Colnbrook (including its satellite hamlets of Poyle and Brands Hill) was taken into the Borough of Slough, and Colnbrook became a civil parish with its own parish council. No longer part of Buckinghamshire and Middlesex, Colnbrook was now the newest addition to Berkshire.

The Inns and Public Houses

Name	Earliest reference	Closure	Location
Catherine Wheel	1475	By 1861	
George	1558	Open today	High St, north side
Red Lion	1602	Open today	
Ostrich	1624	Open today	High St, south side
Angel	1669	1754	not known
Bell	1669	1777	
Swan	1745	Before 1753	High Street
Black Boy	Before 1753	By 1861	Bridge Street
Crown	Before 1753	Open today	London Road
Fighting Cocks	Before 1753	1756	not known
Dukes Head/Chequers	Before 1753	By 1861	High St, south side
Kings Head/Queens Head	Before 1753	1757	
Kings Arms	1756	By 1939	
Green Man	1759	By 1928	
Golden Cross	1784	1952	
Star & Garter	Before 1830	Open today	
Cross Keys	16th century		
Punch Bowl		Open today	
White Hart		By 1961	
Feathers	After 1828		Mill Street
Greyhound	After 1828		Mill Street
Plough	1854 ?		Brands Hill
Cross Keys			Next to Coln Brewery?
Golden Cross			Poyle

The above list is far from complete; only for the period 1753-1828 is there a full list of the inns and alehouses for the Buckinghamshire part of the town. Their existence at other dates and in the Middlesex section of Colnbrook has been gleaned from a variety of sources.

Colnbrook Time Chart

- 1107 Miles Crispin of Iver and Wallingford gives a 'hospice' in Colnbrook to Abingdon Abbey.
- 1337 Four French ambassadors stayed the night at a Colnbrook inn.
- 1342 St Mary's Chapel built in the centre of Colnbrook - in the middle of the street.
- 1479 Earliest mention of a Colnbrook inn by name - Catherine Wheel.
- 1516 Henry VIII reputed to have stayed at the Catherine Wheel Inn [Abingdon House].
- 1530s John Leland travelled through Colnbrook taking note of conditions.
- 1544 Henry VIII granted Colnbrook the status of a borough with rights to hold a weekly market and two annual fairs.
- 1547 Chantry belonging to St Mary's Chapel suppressed.
- 1558 Princess Elizabeth stays for the night at the George Inn.
- 1577 Proposed tax on innkeepers, taverners and alehouse keepers.
- 1595 William Higgins, proprietor of the George Inn makes claim against the butchers.
- 1612 Date of earliest surviving borough records in the Town Book.
- 1624 Richard Goade died. By his will, he left money to be expended on for the poor of Colnbrook, and for an annual sermon to be preached and bread to be distributed on Good Friday. The land, which provided the income, was sold in 1977 for the building of the Westfield Estate and the income to be used for the poor of the parish.
- 1625 Cripple House built on Hermitage Green, on a site is thought to be between the Bath Road and the by-pass, not far from Spital Farm, which probably took its name from the cripple house.
- 1629 Colnbrook devastated by plague.
- 1635 Charles II granted Colnbrook a new borough charter - boundaries set out and the town granted to hold two additional fairs.
- 1636 Carriers Cosmography published. It includes a mention of London boats trading at Colnbrook.
- 1637 Privy Council orders borough bailiffs to keep good order in Colnbrook.
- 1642-49 Civil War. Colnbrook suffered from troops on both sides, and in 1647 the town was devastated.
- 1644 St Mary's rebuilt on site near George Inn. The building also served as a market house.
- c 1644? Baptists began meeting at Colnbrook.
- 1662 Presbyterians began meeting at Colnbrook.
- 1688 Prince of Orange travelled through Colnbrook on his march to London to take over the kingdom.
- 1690 Enquiry into the condition of the bridge over the Colne Brook.
- 1698 Earliest record of stagecoach stopping at Colnbrook.
- 1699-1700 Colnbrook High Street repaved.
- 1708 Particular Baptists founded a church in Colnbrook.
- 1724 Colnbrook petitions the county magistrates.
- 1727 Colnbrook Turnpike Trust founded.
- 1741 13 milestones erected between Cranford Bridge and Maidenhead Bridge.
- 1745 Baptist Church built.
- 1790 Market Place moved from outside the George Inn to site near the Red Lion; it is still called Market Place.
- 1792 St Mary's Chapel was demolished.

- 1794 New St Mary's Chapel built on the east side of the Ostrich.
- 1771 Bridge over Colne Brook again badly in need of repair.
- 1760 Church registers begin.
- 1777 Bridge over the Colne Brook rebuilt.
- 1784 Mail coach service begun, coaches passed through Colnbrook.
- 1799 Horton Inclosure Act. It confirmed Colnbrook's right to hold two fairs each year – on 5 April and 3 May. Inclosure commissioners allocated part of Mildridge Green for the fair.
- 1813 Provision of penny postal service to and from Colnbrook. Foot postman carries letters to Slough, Salt Hill, Farnham Royal, Stoke Green and Wexham.
- 1823 Congregational chapel built in Poyle Road.
- 1827-1728 Pumps provided by Colnbrook Turnpike Trust 1832Reform Act brought an end to Colnbrook Borough.
- 1832 Colnbrook British School opened.
- 1834 Colnbrook National School for boys opened.
- 1838 Traffic census taken.
- 1841 Last mail coach passed through Colnbrook.
- 1850 Primitive Methodist Church built.
- 1852 St Thomas' Church consecrated.
- 1853 Colnbrook became an ecclesiastical parish.
- 1860 The Public Rooms opened.
- 1861 Sub-post office opened in the village.
- 1862 National School for girls and infants opened.
- 1862 Colnbrook Gas Company founded.
- 1871 Present Baptist Church built.
- 1872 Colnbrook Turnpike Trust wound up.
- 1884 Branch line of GWR reached Colnbrook and station built.
- 1889 Royal Commission Report on Market Rights and Tolls states that Colnbrook had a Tuesday market in 1792, but none in 1888, and two livestock fairs for cattle, horses and sheep in both years.
- 1894 Boundaries of civil parish of Iver extended to encompass the Buckinghamshire part of Colnbrook.
- 1898 New National School for boys opened.
- 1903 Colnbrook Coronation Clock unveiled.
- 1912 Sunday bus service to Colnbrook begun by General Omnibus Company.
- 1914 Munitions factory built at Poyle.
- 1926 Colnbrook by-pass opened.
- 1935 Colnbrook War Memorial erected.
- 1949 Colnbrook Residents Association formed.
- 1965 Colnbrook railway station closed.
- 1965 Stanwell Parish, including part of Colnbrook, became part of Surrey instead of Middlesex.
- 1969 Colnbrook won the De Fraine Cup for the best kept village of over 1,000 inhabitants in South Buckinghamshire.
- 1993 Colne Brook Bridge almost rebuilt by Surrey County Council.
- 1995 Slough Borough boundaries extended to include Colnbrook, Brands Hill and Poyle.
- 1998 Slough Borough became a Unitary Authority.

Charities

Town Houses The charity began with gift of 3 houses to the town by Thomas Gasey in 1622, the yearly profit from which should be used for the good of the poor

In 1667 the borough rebuilt the houses, which were on the south side of the High Street, in 1667

Cripple House In 1625 David Salter built a Cripple House on Hermitage Green at the far west of the town, as a lodging place for four poor cripples passing through the town. The chapel wardens paid the chapel clerk 12d a quarter to make the fire and buy the victuals.

It is not known when the cripple house was closed, or what the building was used for before it became the Golden Cross Inn 1784.

Charity School The charity school held in King John's Palace is reputed to have been founded in the early fifteenth century.

It had provision for eleven charity boys among its pupils.

About 1669 Robert Hall became the schoolmaster. He was also the curate of St Mary's Chapel until he was ejected under the Act of Uniformity. He then became a Baptist.

In 1720 the pastor of the Baptist Church, Anthony How, was the schoolmaster

The school was closed sometime in the late eighteenth century.

Richard Goade Trust This Charity began in 1624. Three hundred and eighty years later the trust still helps the needy of the Parish of Colnbrook.

Colnbrook Fire Engine

Colnbrook acquired a fire engine about 1828, the year in which the Inhabitants agreed to appoint trustees and an engineer to look after the engine and its apparatus. Colnbrook's fire brigade formed soon after and was well enough organised to hold a rally in 1831, to which engines from other villages and towns were invited to take part.

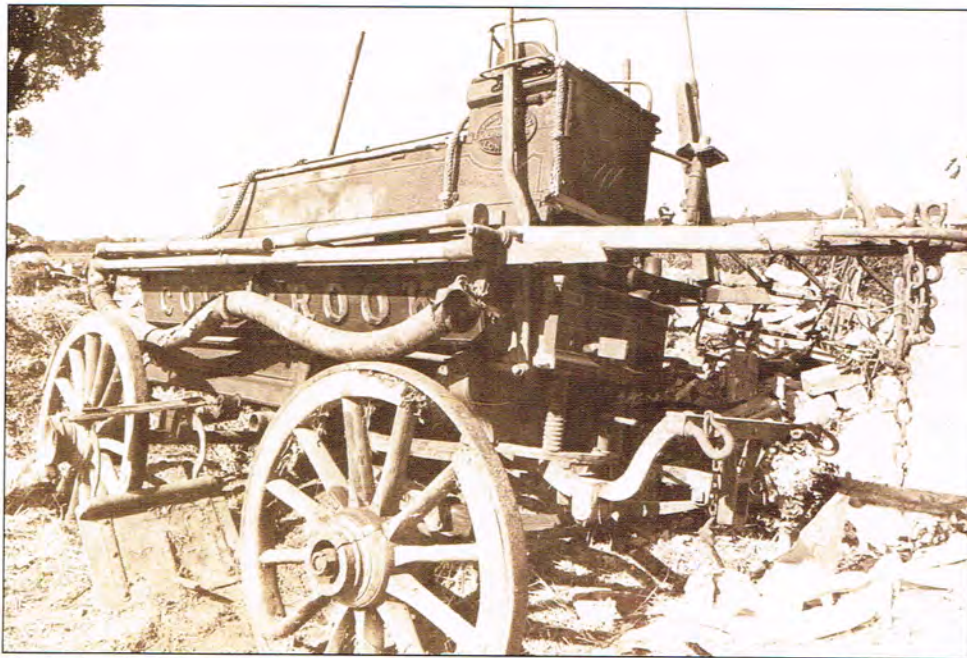
In February 1878 the fire engine was 'discovered' to be in a sad state, and could not be taken out of the shed to attend a fire in Poyle. The house was burnt down. The fire engine had not been driven used since the previous July when it was used to water the village cricket pitch. It had broken down, bursting two of its pipes. The Fire Brigade chief officer explained to the press that he had no funds to mend either the engine or the shed in which it was kept.

From Windsor & Eton Express, 9 Oct 1831

FIRE BRIGADE INSPECTION IN COLNBROOK

Inspection of the fire brigade took place at Poyle Park on Monday. The rally was held by the newly formed Colnbrook Fire Brigade – 20 steam and manual engines took part – from as far afield as Oxford, Wantage and Weybridge as well as local engines. The inhabitants of

Colnbrook entered into the spirit of the rally, decorating the town and closing the businesses so everyone could see. Banner across the street. Slough Volunteers with their band led the procession.



For decades, after it had come to the end of its working life, the Colnbrook Fire Tender was stored in a barn under a pile of hay. When the barn was demolished, to make way for Rayners Close, A South Bucks Council development, this is what remained. The tender is now one of Colnbrook's treasures and is looked after by the Parish Council