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THE FIRST TOLL-ROADS

IRELAND'S TURNPIKE ROADS 1729-1858

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TURNPIKE

The exact origin of this word is obscure. The best explanation is that given by S. and W. Webb in *The Story of the King's Highway* (London 1913) 1963 ed., p. 147. They indicate that the word 'turnpike' originated from the adoption in earlier times 'of horizontal tapering bands of iron or wood suspended on a rigid pillar, around which as an axle, they revolved as a means of admitting outsiders to enclosed areas'. In other words, the 'turnpike' was a primitive form of turnstile and as the tapering bands resembled pikes, this means of access became known as a turnpike. Such means of access were used in the defensive walls of medieval towns and castles to admit friendly visitors and to keep out invaders.

In any case, by the seventeenth century, the word 'turnpike' came to mean a gate across a road, capable of being opened and closed to allow vehicles, horses, beasts of burden and cattle to use the length of road to which the gate gave access, on payment of a prescribed sum of money or toll.