

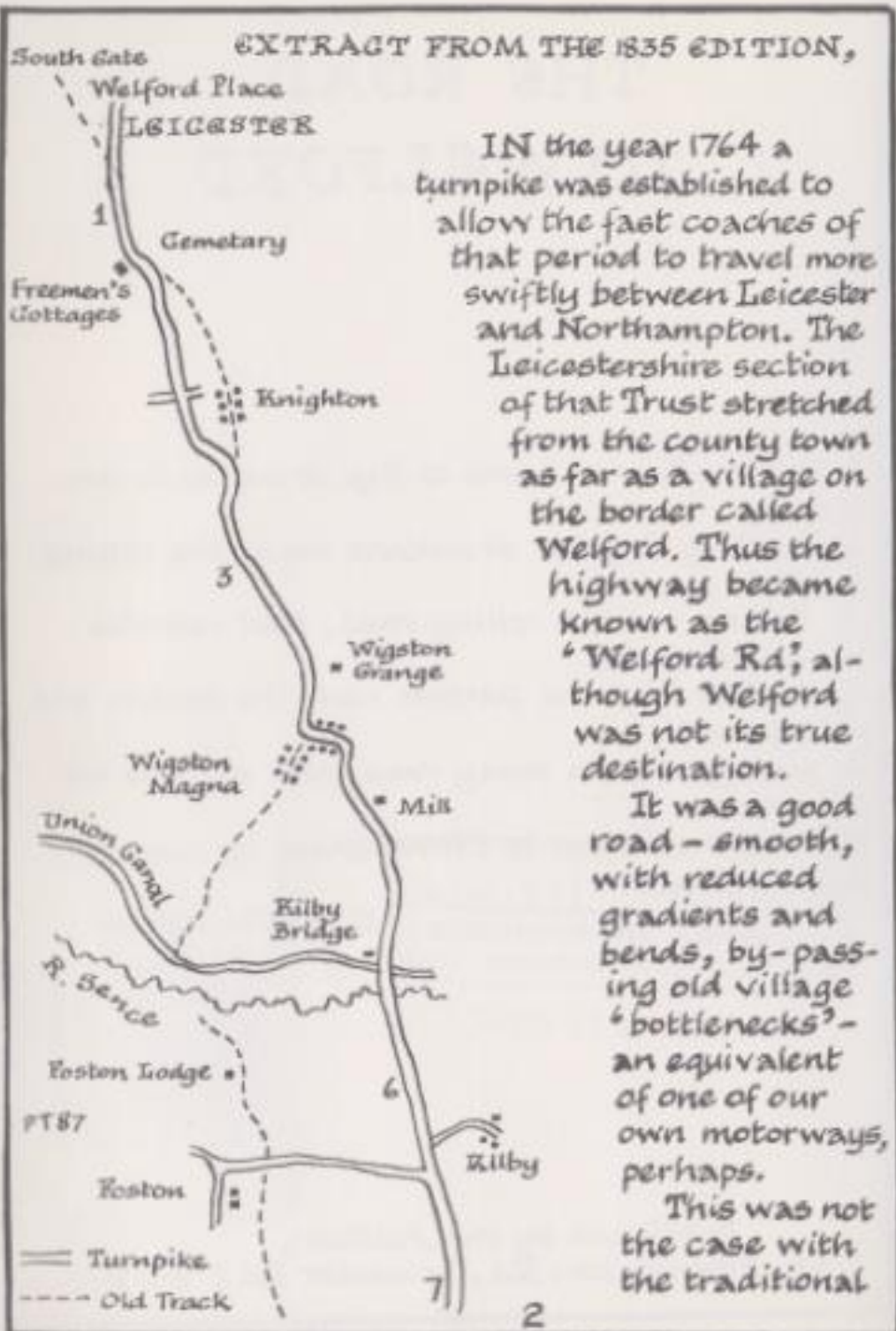
THE
ROAD
TO
WELFORD

LOCAL
STUDIES

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IN the year 1764 a turnpike was established to allow the fast coaches of that period to travel more swiftly between Leicester and Northampton. The Leicestershire section of that Trust stretched from the county town as far as a village on the border called Welford. Thus the highway became known as the 'Welford Rd', although Welford was not its true destination.

It was a good road - smooth, with reduced gradients and bends, by-passing old village 'bottlenecks' - an equivalent of one of our own motorways, perhaps.

This was not the case with the traditional

O. S. MAP OF LEICESTER SHIRE

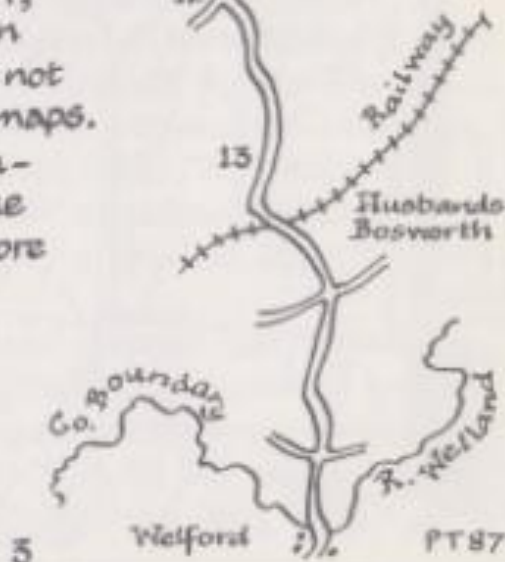
way southwards from medieval Leicester. This was probably not much more than a series of local tracks linking each hill-top settlement, sticking mostly to the high ground. One imagines that the traveller varied his route according to the conditions and where he could rely upon hospitality. As to direction; perhaps he went so far then 'asked the way again', rather as one does today in a strange city. Roads are not even shown on antique maps.

Surprisingly, the turnpike has remained - as the A50 - almost as it was more than 200 years ago. The old tracks, however, declined as they became overgrown by the large pastures allotted in the 18th cent. Enclosure

Awards. 'Rights of Way', nevertheless, were preserved under these Acts, and they can still be traced today as field paths.

In this booklet I have endeavoured to follow and find features of interest along both routes.

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Welford

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WHAT appears to have been the old through road goes down towards the church, the oldest building in the street being a thatched cottage, perhaps 17th cent. St Peter's, Arnesby, stands on a hill-ock, and is partly Late Norman. In its graveyard the oldest tombstone I was able to find was one dated 1714.

Past the church the road becomes a rutted track which eventually ends in a field gate. Beyond it, the grass contains a shallow depression climbing alongside a ditch. Its markings suggest that it is a contin-

ARNESBY
CHURCH

uation of the track, perhaps head-
ing towards Shearsby. From
high in this field one can
look back and see

Arnesby as one
imagines the
medieval wan-
derer may
have
done.



'OLD' WELFORD RD, SHEARSBY



RETURNING

to the uninhabited Welford Rd and driving on for a mile or so, we turn right to take us into Shearsby. Right again in the village, and we are travelling back towards Arnesby along a narrow road which, like Arnesby's, peters out. A check of the Ordnance Survey map tells us that the two road 'stumps' are linked by a footpath - further proof of the existence of an old highway.

As we retrace our tracks, St. Mary's 'without-a-spire' (the pinnacle was taken down in 1789), perched high above, looks down upon us and the 'old' Welford road, winding as since time immemorial into her little village of cruck-framed farm buildings.

1669 HOUSE,
SHEARSBY



THE thatch and timbered house illustrated was restored some years ago. It stands opposite the church where the road descends towards the village square.

And down on the green, surely there is nothing more evocative of a rural way of life long past than the sight of Shearsby's 18th cent. parish pump?

Another device once seen all over the countryside was the windmill. Unlike Arnesby's, that of

Shearsby has been removed, but according to the O.S. map, it stood during the last century to the west of the narrow road leading out from the village towards Knaptoft. Records tell of one Wm Weston, who was 'unfortunately caught' in it, and who 'expired April 8, 1756.'

South of the windmill and the Bruntingthorpe road, a salt spring was discovered on 'Reeve's Land,' where the Bath Hotel is situated today.

SITUATED at intervals along the western verge of the Welford Rd are five milestones, one of them being between Shearsby and Knaptoft. Judging by the crest displayed upon them, and the style of their lettering and figures, these posts are the original ones placed by the Turnpike Trust - the first time such objects had been seen in this county since the departure of the Romans. Today, they are all that remains of the 18th cent. road-builders, except, of course, for the highway itself.

Before the advent of regular coach services that turnpikes made possible, a market town such as Leicester communicated its business by the rather haphazard use of the messenger. There are frequent references in the Borough Records to citizens being despatched to faraway places; to London, for instance, to inspect important documents; or to another town to attend the court of a visiting noble. Upon his return, he was winned and dined, and persuaded to 'relate the gossip.'



MILESTONE, WELFORD RD,
NR KNAPTOFT