

Lockdown News: June 2020

Society News

As we write this newsletter, the lockdown is easing gradually but the Society won't meet again until September at the earliest. We will keep you informed if anything changes. As mentioned last time, subscription renewals will be delayed by the number of meetings missed. If you have any interesting material for the next newsletter, please let us know. Thank you, Jennifer. [REDACTED]

The first to step up to the plate is Alan Medley.....

Stagecoaches and Turnpikes by Alan Medley

I'm booked to do a talk about Stagecoaches and Turnpikes next year – if we're back to normal by then. I thought I would offer this little taster in case you're missing our monthly dose of history.

I've always been fascinated by the thought of stagecoaches with teams of horses rushing through Sidcup, just a few yards from where we hold our meetings. If anything my interest increased after the needless destruction of the facade of The Black Horse - one of the few tangible links back to those days.



The route through Sidcup was over the toll road managed by the New Cross Turnpike Trust. Trusts were formed around the country from around 1707, and this one was formed in 1718 to manage and improve the roads through this part of Kent. The Trust had 3 main routes from New Cross Gate, this one on the way to Maidstone, another to Dover through Welling, and the third on the road to Hastings via Bromley.



The busiest of these was the old Dover Road which followed the ancient route of Watling Street from London, via Canterbury, to the coast. There are no photographs of course, but there are some great paintings of stagecoaches on the road including this one by Henry Alken showing the London to Dover mail coach in full flight.

There were up to 50 coaches a day on the Dover road by the early 19th century, including the daily mail coach and regular coaches to Paris via Calais. You can get a real feel for the realities of stagecoach travel in the late 18th century from Charles Dickens's Tale of Two Cities, where he describes the challenges of ascending Shooter's Hill, with the passengers walking alongside in the dark and the mud, and the real



