

## The Bullock Road

The Huntingdonshire (now Cambridgeshire) Bullock Road runs for c.18km from the Elton to Alwalton road west of Peterborough, mainly along high land between 50-65m, south to Upton near Alconbury. From here it may have joined Ermine Street to Huntingdon and probably on to St Ives, which had held a Bullock market in Front Street until 1886, or continued further south.<sup>[1]</sup>

The present road is a mainly tarmacked, sometimes single-track road. It may have remained as an entirely green lane until the 20th century, with some sections towards the south remaining so. These are subject to Traffic Regulation Orders (TRO), where gates or barriers may be locked shut, for vehicles of more than two wheels during the winter.



Locked TRO gate on the Bullock Road at Great Gidding. (Image: Google Earth)

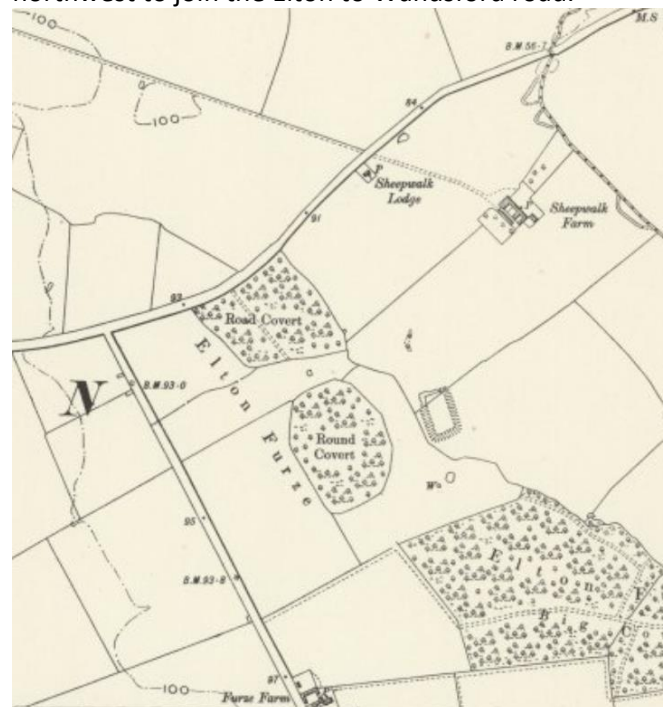
Originally the road may have continued north of the Elton Road to reach Wandsford. Perhaps it followed the Great North Road, which diverged from the Roman Ermine Street at Water Newton.<sup>[2]</sup> Christopher Taylor noted that the stretch of Ermine Street between Alconbury and Wandsford, appears to have gone out of use in the post-Roman period - perhaps due to the collapse of the bridge over the River Nene at Durobrivae.<sup>[3]</sup> There was then a shift towards routes running along higher ground. John Cary's map of 1794 (below) appears to show the Bullock Road running directly north of the Elton road to Wandsford. Here the River Nene may have been more easily forded.

This however may just have been a bit of cartographic licence based on inexact local knowledge. The 1st Edition Ordnance Survey map



Cary's New Map of England and Wales and Part of Scotland, 1794, sheet 34. (Image: <https://www.oldmapsonline.org>)

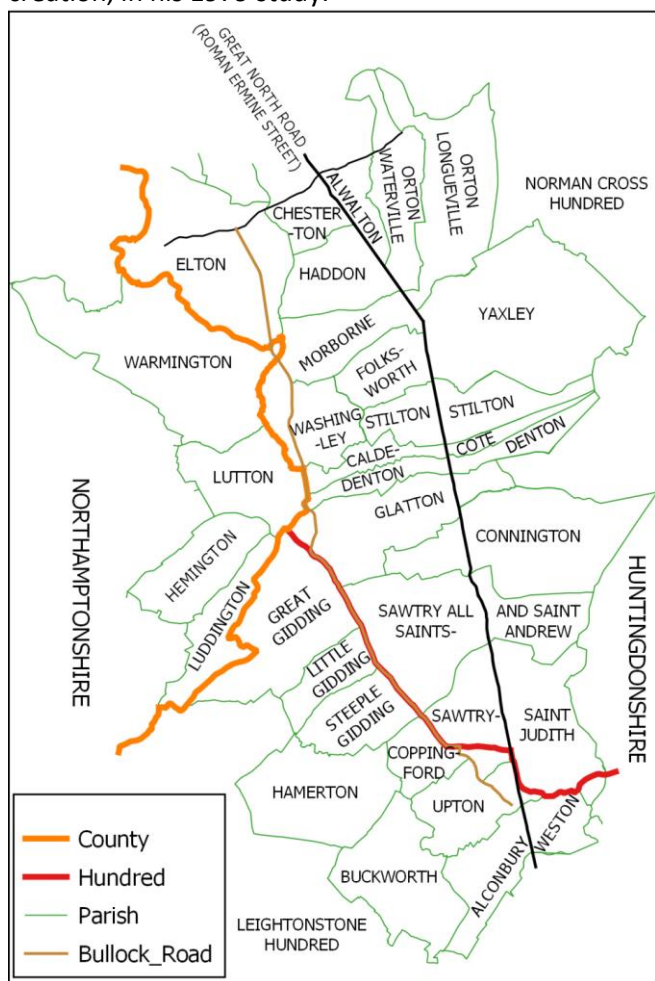
(below) however, shows what appears to be a sheep walk leaving the Elton/Alwalton road, running northwest to join the Elton to Wandsford road.<sup>[4]</sup>



Extract of O.S. 25" to 1 mile 1<sup>st</sup> Edition maps. (Reproduced with the permission of the National Library of Scotland)

This could be what Cary was attempting to show on his 1794 map. Although the sheep walk could have been the modified remains of an earlier, more direct route, Susan Oosthuizen (pers. comm) notes that the name very often denoted the right to graze sheep on arable land after harvest.

The road's date of origin is uncertain, but it could be a droving route of great antiquity, as a number of parish boundaries and in part the Northants/Hunts county border, were aligned with it, or it with them. Christopher Taylor concluded that it was a medieval creation, in his 1979 study.



The Bullock Road in C19th. (Redrawn from several sources)

To the north of Stilton, parish boundaries are focused on the Great North Road, with the western bounds of Chesterton, Haddon and partly Morborne, following the Billing Brook.

From Morborne the Northants/Hunts county border follows the Billing Brook as far as Glatton before swinging away to the south-west. The western boundaries of the Huntingdonshire parishes of Morborne, Washingley, Caldecote, Denton and most of Glatton, are followed by the Bullock Road.

At its western end, the boundary between the Huntingdonshire hundreds of Norman Cross and Leightonstone commences at the point where the

parishes of Glatton and Great Gidding meet the county boundary. Then it follows a road from Lutton, which itself may have been another droving route. Turning east it drops down from the higher ground, following the Sawtry St Judith/Coppingford parish boundary. After meeting the Great North Road, the hundred boundary follows it south for a little way before turning to the east again. The Bullock Road joins the hundred boundary at Glatton, following it (or vice versa) to Upton where it deviates to the south, staying on higher ground.

The road may have acquired its present name following the creation of the Turnpike Trusts, particularly those on the Great North Road to the east in 1710,<sup>[5]</sup> and was known by such name by 1810.<sup>[6]</sup> The southern section is also shown on the map of 1817 below.<sup>[7]</sup>



Extract of W. Hyett's 1817 'Wellingborough' map. (British Library. Licence: OGL V1.0)

Not a unique landscape feature, there was for instance a Bullock Road from Wales, also known as the 'Welshman's Road'.<sup>[8]</sup> This route picked up Watling Street, the modern A5, running down to markets in London and the south.

A Bullock Booth is identified part way along the road from Kettering to Northampton on Hyett's 1813 map<sup>[9]</sup>, although by the time of the first edition of the Ordnance Survey maps in 1884, the name has become Booth Farm.<sup>[10]</sup>

There is a Bullock Road near Terrington St Clements (Nfk), which is part of a route from Sheperdsgate Road at Tilney High End in the east, and Hay Green Road and Market Lane Walpole St Andrew to the west.

Several Bullock Lanes and Bullock(s) Roads can be found on modern maps, although some are quite short local ones. A Bullockstone Road runs from Herne Bay (Kent) to Herne Common. Of course, Yaxley (Cams) had a Cow Lane (now Windsor Road). This is a very wide road which was part of the route used to

move animals from farms on higher land, down to summer grazing on the fens.

Although the origins of the Huntingdonshire Bullock Road are not entirely clear, it certainly provided a means of moving stock toll-free, whilst avoiding congestion and damage to the Monarch's Highways.

I must thank Dr. Susan Oosthuizen for commenting on aspects of this article and for pointing me in the direction of Christopher Taylor's study.

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#### References:

- <sup>[1]</sup> The Norris Museum, St Ives, Cambridgeshire. PH/S.IVE/Crwn.St/01a-b <https://www.norrismuseum.org.uk/discover/museum-collection/> [accessed 05/04/2022]
- <sup>[2]</sup> 'Hungerton - Huntingdonshire', in A Topographical Dictionary of England, ed. Samuel Lewis (London, 1848), pp. 583-588. British History Online <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/topographical-dict/england/pp583-588> [accessed 04/04/2022].
- <sup>[3]</sup> Taylor, C. 1979. The Roads and Tracks of Britain, pp 120-124.
- <sup>[4]</sup> National Library of Scotland - map images. <https://maps.nls.uk/os/25inch-england-and-wales/> [accessed 05/04/2022]
- <sup>[5]</sup> Great North Road: Turnpikes. <https://greatnorthroad.co.uk/turnpikes> [accessed 05/04/2022]
- <sup>[6]</sup> Stamford Mercury 17th August 1810, p2. <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk> [accessed 04/04/2022]
- <sup>[7]</sup> [https://commons.m.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ordnance\\_Survey\\_Drawings\\_-\\_Wellingborough,\\_Northamptonshire\\_\(OSD\\_252\).jpg](https://commons.m.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ordnance_Survey_Drawings_-_Wellingborough,_Northamptonshire_(OSD_252).jpg) [accessed 05/04/2022]
- <sup>[8]</sup> [https://hyperleap.com/topic/Welsh\\_Road](https://hyperleap.com/topic/Welsh_Road) [accessed 07/04/2022]
- <sup>[9]</sup> [https://commons.m.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ordnance\\_Survey\\_Drawings\\_-\\_Northampton,\\_Northamptonshire\\_\(OSD\\_253\).jpg](https://commons.m.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ordnance_Survey_Drawings_-_Northampton,_Northamptonshire_(OSD_253).jpg) [accessed 07/04/2022]
- <sup>[10]</sup> Ordnance Survey 6" to 1 mile map, Northampton, sheet XXXVIII.SW. Published 1884. [www.nls.uk](http://www.nls.uk) [accessed 07/04/2022]