

Stonehouse 1600-1800: moving on

People moved before 1800, sometimes at the speed of a horse, but mainly on foot, in short stages. The Elizabethan poor law of 1601 brought together measures against vagrancy. Parishes could now raise poor rates to help their own, but there was no help for those moving to look for work. Many still travelled long distances, pushed onwards by parishes. Manors also discouraged 'strangers', and where possible kept control of housing provision.

In 1662 the settlement system was introduced. Armed with a certificate, a person could stop in a new place. If they fell into need, they could be 'removed' to the parish which had given them settlement, or be supported by it where they were. Vagrants without a settlement could be punished and moved on. The way these laws were applied shaped many lives.



Stonehouse Church and Court, parish and manor



Elizabeth Gail married William Sparrow, the son of a Stonehouse carpenter, at Pitchcombe in 1718. He had left Stonehouse after the death of his first wife, but his settlement was still there. In 1726 the parish of Kenilworth in Warwickshire ordered that Elizabeth Sparrow and her daughter be removed to Stonehouse, where she died a widow in 1734.

A turnpike trust took over the main road from Gloucester through Stonehouse in 1726, and the Stroudwater Canal opened in 1779, both improved travel routes which challenged movement controls.

18th century milestone on the turnpike road at Cainscross, in the old parish of Stonehouse

The navvies who built the canal were temporary visitors, but some of the people who managed and worked it settled at Newtown, on the edge of Stonehouse in neighbouring Eastington.

Thomas Lewis, a labourer from Kidderminster in Worcestershire, lived in Wiltshire with his wife before moving to Ebley in Stonehouse. He was appointed the first keeper of Ryeford Double Lock in 1780, and moved into the new lock cottage, built in 1784. He moved again to Eastington after 1815.

Stonehouse before 1800 offered many opportunities, and would probably have attracted more incomers, but for the controls set by parish and manor. Economic and political change began to challenge these, and led people to move in new ways in the new century.



Ryeford Double Lock, keeper's cottage built 1784

Sources available from Stonehouse History Group