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The 'Last' Stagecoach Dave Bubier

*From a talk given at Coventry AGM March 24th, 2012
but also including some additional information from new
sources arising subsequently*

Probably anyone you care to ask would have a clear perception of what a 'Stagecoach' was and looked like. Has it not been long immortalised on greeting cards as the very epitome of Christmas past, the world of Dickens, etc., a nostalgic memory of a bygone age, even if slightly rose-tinted? Leaving aside the stark reality that stagecoaches would not have habitually ploughed through deep snow drifts, even when tested on a younger generation, this perception still lingers, provided perhaps you can dispel any initial thoughts of a leading provider of modern day motorbuses.

The paradox is, of course, that in strictly defined terms the Stagecoach had a relatively short life. Evolved in the 18th century of a necessity to improve communications during the industrial revolution, it was rapidly eclipsed as a point to point carrier over longer distances by the railway from 1830 on and may be considered as an era to have drawn to a close during the 1850s. So why should the term be such an ingrained public memory 150 years on?



Sample Withdrawal Dates of Key Routes:-

1839	-	London to Birmingham
1844	-	London to Bristol
1848	-	London to Plymouth
1858	-	Manchester to Derby

The fact is that the 'stagecoach' as a vehicle was perpetuated, although evolving into a somewhat different animal as has been outlined previously in these pages (*Duncan Wood, no. 58, June 2009*). Road coach services continued in what became known as the 'Revival' period in the latter part of the 19th C and beyond. Whilst many of the salient facts are fairly well documented, there is perhaps a need to draw together the strands of the whys and the >>

wherefores. This account looks at these latter day 'stagecoaches', primarily as regards London and the Home Counties, also considering some of the personalities involved.

There is clear evidence that even before the final key roads had been vacated that an element of nostalgia was developing for the traditional mode of travel. Concern was expressed at renowned coachmen being thrown out of work, the whole infrastructure of proprietors, the posting hotels that served them, ancillary trades such as farriers, etc, all were affected by what was a sharp decline. That questions were asked in Parliament also hints at another factor, which CGH* makes much of: many prominent, wealthy, personages, including peers, politicians, military officers, even the odd high churchman, were keen amateur 'four in hand' drivers who were not unknown to have 'taken the ribbons' themselves during the course of regular journeys, even been gainfully employed thus.

In the horse drawn world the vast majority of males, certainly, and not a few women, would consider themselves quite capable of driving a one horse conveyance on the roads – much as most people drive a car today. The difference in skills needed to 'tool along' four in harness equates to those required to drive an articulated lorry compared to a car – i.e., it is one acquired through a lot of practice. It was, of course, a military discipline that officers of all ranks would need to demonstrate familiarity with in order to exercise command but for many others, of otherwise 'independent means', it was the desire to emulate as a hobby the craft of a trade that had a fascination for them. Might they be considered the first road transport enthusiasts?

The end of the true stagecoach era led to many wealthy patrons around the country purchasing their own coaches and using them for private outings for their friends and guests. Several 'Driving Clubs' were formed in London and annual parades held in Hyde Park. These clubs still exist – the Duke of Edinburgh took up carriage driving for a while after giving up polo.

*CGH - 'Stagecoach & Mail in Days of Yore' by Charles G Harper, 2 volumes, London, Chapman & Hall, 1903

In London in particular a distinct 'Coaching Season' lasting from about April to September began to evolve from the 1860s, day trips running to popular destinations of about two to three hours duration with a handful of longer runs for the more dedicated. In this early phase there was much emphasis on bringing out of retirement renowned old coachmen of the past era to 'whip' the private coaches of the private owners.

In the provinces the situation was somewhat different. Commercial proprietors in the key tourist areas – West Country, Lake District, Snowdonia, etc – exploited the demand for 'trips' using what was fast becoming the nostalgic 'old times' mode. These generally catered for an up market clientele; open 'brakes' were provided for the general excursionist.

POPULAR 'TRIPS' FROM LONDON:-

- Boxhill - 'Rocket'
- Brighton* - various
- Dorking - 'Perseverance'
- Guildford - 'New Times'
- Hampton Court - 'Vivid'
- Harrow - 'Sportsman'
- Lingfield - 'Excelsior'
- Maidenhead - 'Express'
- St Albans - 'Wonder'
- Shepperton - 'Present Times'
- Virginia Water - 'Old Times'
- Windsor - 'Venture'
- Races (Ascot, Epsom, Lingfield, etc)

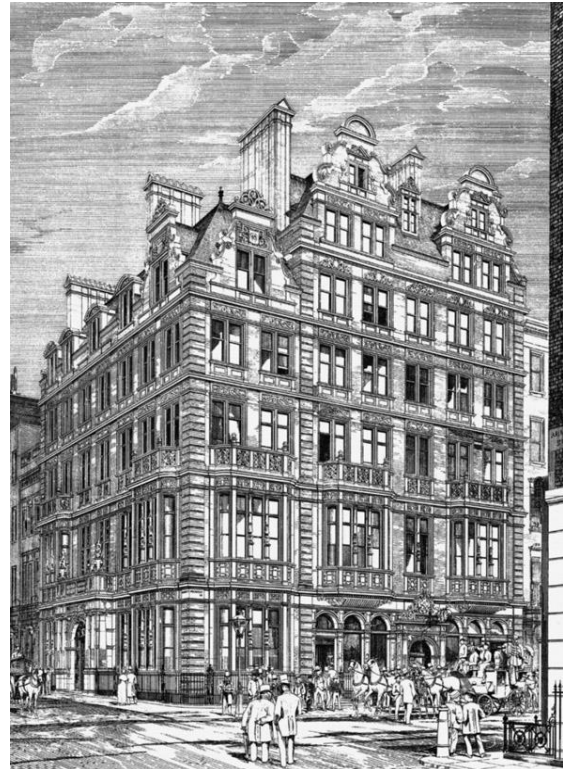
* option of returning by train or following day

Whilst this pattern of operation continued into the 1870s there was a growing tendency for the coaches to be owned by 'syndicates' of private owners who shared the driving. Increasingly the coaches were maintained and horsed by commercial proprietors, jobmasters who might also be involved in omnibuses and cabs or related trades. Some of these started to become more directly involved rather than just providing stabling. What is very noticeable is the degree of mutual agreement being shown amongst all parties. There were frequent annual exchanges of the various 'roads' between proprietors and no visible element of the kind of competition that had existed in the 'stagecoach' era. Some routes were advertised with intermediate pick-up points, particularly those to the north of

London and for this reason it might be supposed that these 'Road Coaches' were of interest to the Public Carriage Office of the Metropolitan Police, who regulated the cab trade. The Metropolitan Public Carriages Act 1869 empowered the Home Secretary to licence 'public carriages' and it seems possible that it was this that led to the latter day 'stagecoaches' being placed on a more professional footing. Further investigation as to this is ongoing.

Whilst many of the amateur owners were not involved in order to make profit they would have presumably preferred to break even on costs. The professional proprietors would, again presumably, have taken the opposing view. The fares levied were deliberately kept at high levels in order to dissuade the 'lower orders' and ensure passengers only rubbed shoulders with suitable companions. They were almost certainly attractive to social climbers seeking introductions. Medium distance trips from London were the equivalent of around £55 a head at today's prices. That alone was not enough to maintain viability and in fact there was another commercial incentive. Young horses were purchased in the Spring sales in the shires having been broken into harness by their breeders. A season of running in teams produced strong, experienced, carriage horses that could be sold at the Autumn sales at premium prices, the auctioneers often citing the 'road' they had been working. It should be remembered that a number of changes of teams were required, these taking place at key points (Inns), with the replaced team rested, to be picked up again on the return journey. The day trip to Virginia Water, as example, required four changes each way, thus twenty horses in all. These comprised: *Greyhound*, *Sheen*; *Kings Arms*, *Hampton Court*; *Bear*, *Walton*; *Crown*, *Weybridge*.

Whilst the late 1880s undoubtedly saw the flowering of the 'revival' period and was somewhat celebrated in what may be termed the 'sporting' sectors of society, it was not seen as successor to the 'stagecoach' era of the past or as any kind of 'preservation movement'. CGH does not even mention them and it must be remembered that by and large those now involved were of an age that had never experienced the true stagecoach period.



HATCHETT'S HOTEL & COFFEE HOUSE, Piccadilly

"At this time the revival of coaching was at its zenith, and in the White Horse Cellars, underneath Hatchett's, was the booking-office for all the road coaches. Piccadilly in those days was rarely without the tootling of the guard's horn, and the departure and arrival of the many teams was an attraction to all those who loved the sound of champing bits and the rattle of the splinter-bars....."

"It was a cheery crowd who constituted 'the see 'em home club,' and whose headquarters were the coffee-room at Hatchett's. Sportsmen, all of them. They could give you the points of a horse as easily as those of a pretty woman, and there was no question of sport upon which you could not get a reliable opinion from them."

"They looked upon the coffee-room as their own holy of holies, and woe betide the stranger who tried to force himself unasked into their select coterie. What rattling good fellows they all were! And what times they had! Heigho!"

Robert Standish Sievier (1860-1939)

Many were members (a pre-requisite of society) of a sportsmans' club, Pelicans, and the principal biographer of that, Frank M Boyd* sums it up:

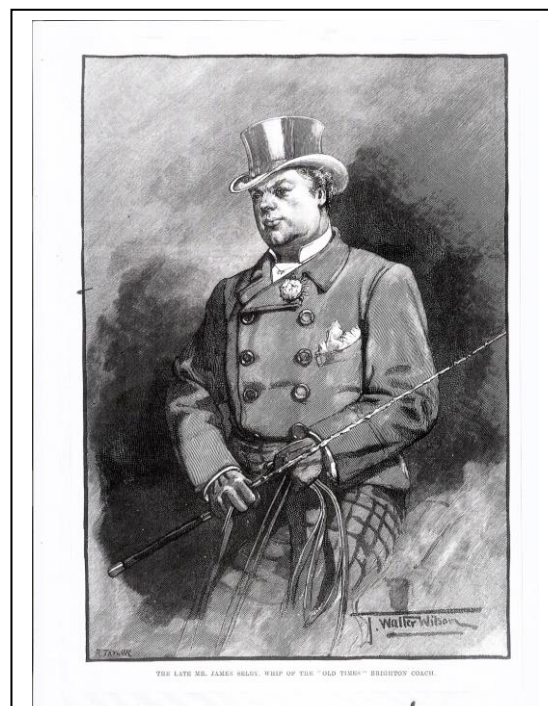
"At one time a number of the Pelicans took quite seriously to coaching, and either possessed themselves of four-in-hands, or acquired shares in coaches, driving them so many days a month and paying very stiffly for so doing."

Thus you had this circle or 'set' of friends and many of the runs probably as much 'jollys' for all concerned as serious revenue earning services.

The most celebrated event associated with this set took place in 1888 when, at Ascot, a wager of a thousand guineas to 500 was made that a coach could not be driven to Brighton and back in eight hours, the one way record then standing at four hours, 21 minutes. James Selby, a well known professional coachman, partner in a coachbuilding concern and somewhat of a public character of the time, took up the challenge. At 10.0 o'clock on 13th July his 'Old Times' departed the White Horse Cellars with six fellow 'Pelicans' as passengers plus guard, all experienced 'whips' themselves. Police had been briefed to keep key intersections clear whilst ostlers changed teams sixteen times, often in record time and in one case taking only 40 seconds! Never once leaving the box and pausing at the 'Old Ship' at Brighton only sufficient to record the event, Selby arrived back in Piccadilly ten minutes within the challenge and with 'half London' turned out to see him pull up.

The rigours of this achievement combined with that of his lifestyle in general, driving day in, day out and only overseeing his business affairs at night, sadly contributed to his death in December that same year at the early age of 44. The funeral cortège from his Edgware Road home to Highgate was said to be a mile long and included almost every road coach then running. His tomb (still to be seen) is decorated with a whip. He has no descendents today, many who claim this are in reality from another James Selby, a contemporary cab and omnibus proprietor.

* Frank M Boyd 'A Pelicans Tale: 50 years of London and Elsewhere', London, 1919



Above: Obituary portrait of James 'Jem' Selby, 'Illustrated London News', Dec 29th 1888

The autobiographies of Sievier (extracts above) and Frank M Boyd, plus Hounsell's *Coach Guide*, of which more anon, identify many of those involved in coaching in the 1880s and 1890s. The present writer is engaged in building up biographical profiles of as many of these as possible. A snapshot here of just Selby's companions on his 'Drive to Brighton', (the then 'Old Times' syndicate), is an indicator of what diverse and interesting characters they were:

BECKETT, Henry Lyndhurst (1857-1896) 'Partner' - (all 'Pelicans' had nicknames by which they were invariably known) – wealthy family, Captain in West Essex Militia (largely a sinecure), bought the 'Old Times' on Selby's death but was bankrupted in 1892, married to recoup money (no issue) and appears to have been working the Margate to Canterbury coach seasonally at the time of his death.

BLYTH Carlton Valiant (1851-1931) 'Hullo There!' only son of a wealthy merchant, he inherited a vast fortune in his teens. By far the most colourful of all, he was almost certainly homosexual although

married, briefly, twice (his first wife died mysteriously at Ramsgate whilst he was running the Margate to Canterbury in 1877, second was late in life to his housekeeper) and for a period a Captain in the Royal Berks Militia. His full obituary (*Times*, Sept 15th 1931) outlines an extraordinary association with coaching that commenced with running Torrington to Bideford at the age of 20, included London to Oxford via Reading and even (1879) Oxford to Cambridge via London! Needless to say his fortune had dissipated by the turn of the century but in retirement at Bude he was an inveterate poster of notices in the *Times* personal columns, the final one, not long before his death wishing all who remembered him *'Good luck, and cheerio! Keep the tambourine a rolling!'* A full biography of CVB may be attempted by the writer.

BROADWOOD Alfred S (1857-1911) *'Swish'* younger brother to a Brigadier General, he was said to have an unequalled command of profane language! Never recorded as having any occupation, always, *'living on own means'*.

COSIER William P (1859-1940?) *'Bob'* a Kentish Man, seemingly a *'landed proprietor'*, he was living in Boston, Lincs, in 1891 and Bedfordshire in 1901 but thereafter is harder to trace with certainty.

DICKSON Walter (1857?-n/k) *'Dicky the Driver'*. Not identified with certainty but appears to have been a Chelsea based art dealer. A founder member of the *'Pelicans'*.

GODDEN Walter (1862-1931) *'Guard'*. Son of an Eastbourne *'fly'* proprietor he was guard on a Folkestone-Canterbury coach at a young age. Lacking inherited wealth he was a one time lodging house keeper. He was a noted performer on the old *'yard of tin'* and his book of tunes, *'Post Horn Tootles'* remains the standard work. His *'Old Times Coach Song'* provides an insightful account of a days *'jolly'* to Virginia Water.

McADAM Anthony Foster (1862-1930). Born in Berwick on Tweed, by profession a journalist and newspaper proprietor (certainly the conduit of the Pelicans publicity) as well as a noted amateur *'whip'* with hands *'as hard as granite'*.

Through the 1890s the general pattern of coaching from London continued and was aided by the publication of *'Hounsell's Coach Guide'* annually from, it is thought, 1892 to 1897. Bernard Hounsell (1860-1930) forsook life with the family rope making business in Bridport to become a journalist (*'Benedick'* of *'The Sportsman'*) and musician in London. In his coach guide (copies of which are like the proverbial *'hens teeth'* although the Bodleian in Oxford is thought to have a run) he not only describes the various coach runs from London but many of the provincial ones as well. Importantly, he gives the present and past proprietors, with photo portraits in some cases, with much history of each *'road'*. A man after my own heart! He later immigrated to and died in Australia.

By this period the centre for coaching had removed from Piccadilly to the *'Victoria Hotel'* in Northumberland Avenue. As the new century dawned the number of coach runs had declined, but this must not be put down immediately to the advent of the motor car. The *'Pelicans'* set and the day of the amateur *'syndicates'* was over. Several (if not the majority) had exhausted their fortunes whilst *'Swish'* Broadwood was temporarily avoiding society after a messy divorce and living with his mistress in Jersey! The professional coachmen who remained offered a more restrained programme with less flamboyant publicity that continued through the Edwardian period although, admittedly increasingly bowing to the motor car.

The continued demand for coaching from London is instanced by the story of the *'Tantivy'*, which its coaching enthusiast owner, John Thompson, had been running from Dublin to Bray since 1887. In 1900 he brought it over and ran the Maidenhead and Henley road until 1904 before moving it to Brighton for 1905 and having a local livery stable proprietor do a double run to Tunbridge Wells that from time to time that had none other than *'Swish'* Broadwood acting as whip. The *'Tantivy'* is a survivor to this day.

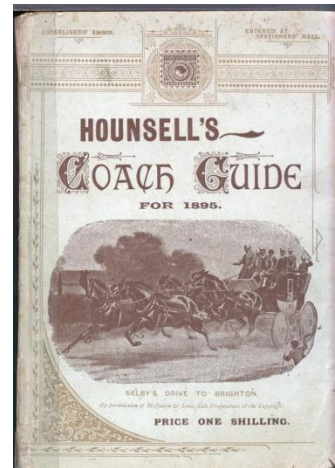
1908 saw a curious episode. In that year the American millionaire Vanderbilt came over and with his *'Venture'* coach reintroduced a London to Brighton run. He persuaded Walter Godden to come out of retirement and to act as guard.

Post WW1 found surviving coaches from the 'Revival' era mainly in private hands, making occasional forays with private parties and, in due course, featuring in cinema films. That the question of whether the 1930 Road Traffic Act was to be applied to horse drawn vehicles ('No' the answer) was actually raised, if possibly tongue in cheek, suggests the subject exercised someone. In 1938 it was possible to produce one with a goodly crowd of well-wishers to mark the 50th anniversary of Selby's death by placing a plaque at his Edgware Road home. A handful of advertised (which should be our criteria) trips are evident in the inter-war period, notably to Epsom for the Derby right up to 1939. That perhaps meets our ultimate goal of being the 'last' advertised stagecoach. Thereafter perhaps further words from Frank M Boyd are the most apposite. Commenting on Selby's run he says:

'..... there was lots of talk of attempting to lower Selby's record the record remained where it had been placed, and I fancy it is likely to stay there, for in these days of motoring, coaching is as dead as Marley, or a door nail than which, as Dickens has proved to us, nothing can be deader.'

However, some stage – or rather 'road' - coaches remain in captivity and still make those occasional forays that the public can associate with those Christmas card images of an era that long pre-dated them.

END



The only copy of 'Hounsell's' to appear on the market in recent times and the catalyst for the writers researches.

Now owned by Clive Cheeseman of Maidstone

AND A POSTSCRIPT

June 30th 2012:

A horse-drawn stagecoach left the Charles Dickens Museum in London for Dover on a two-day journey to mark the bicentenary of the author's birth. The 19th Century-style road coach, called *Nimrod*, (*nb*: actually a 'new build' 2005 example) is travelling in five stages on the 88-mile route.

On Saturday Mark Dickens, the great-great grandson of the Victorian author, was among the passengers. The coach stopped briefly at Gad's Hill in Higham, Kent, where Dickens spent the last years of his life.

Organiser Colin Pawson said the journey had been planned by a group of friends who were all coaching enthusiasts and who had made similar fundraising journeys in the past.

He said: *"This journey came about because the coach was signed London to Dover. These road coaches always operated on signed routes, we never had the opportunity to drive the Dover Road before, and when the bicentenary came up, we decided this was the occasion."*

He said passengers on the coach were raising money for Barnardo's because Dickens had been particularly concerned about disadvantaged children. He also said the author's novels had featured many coach journeys including *The Pickwick Papers*. The *Nimrod* coach is carrying seven people on each stage of the journey, with five stages each day, using five teams of horses.

(BBC News online)

‘Find paths and use them rather than roads’: The representation of motor-touring in the English countryside by the Great Western Railway, 1918-39

Robert MacKinnon
(concluded from *Journal* 68)

Hugh Page wrote that it was ‘the modern tendency to rush through and less than half see the country’,⁹ going on to say in another of his guidebooks that ‘some people by thinking of getting over the ground more quickly, the more they see, in fact really see less’.¹⁰ The beauties of a countryside landscape again for Hugh Page ‘could not be seen by motoring or rushing through it’ but needed ‘careful preparation and humble entry on foot’ the field, lane and path being ‘where true beauty and enchantment of the countryside is simply not available to the motorist’¹¹. For the GWR, the intricate details of a countryside landscape were argued to be lost on the motor tourist, experiencing it as a series of fleeting impressions. Stuart Mais, a GWR guidebook writer, in one of the GWR’s ‘coffee-table’ type rural guidebooks that narrated places of historic interest and beauty, aimed at a middle-class (and likely car-owning) readership, entitled *Glorious Devonshire*, put forward that

*to get in touch with the real Dartmoor you have to walk ... its contours are as varied and as lovely as its colours, looked at from a distance it seems a magic land. Looked at from the closest possible quarters it defiantly becomes one, it is only when you skim lightly across it that it entirely evades you*¹²

The American Thomas Dowler-Murphy and a friend in *Unfamiliar England with a Motor Car* (1924) toured England’s shires in search for a historic England. Dowler-Murphy cursed the narrow, poorly surfaced, windy, steeply graded roads but admired the straight well surfaced and low graded ones that enabled them to transverse quickly and easily across country, from beauty spot to beauty spot. After visiting the ‘picturesque’ village of Tong in Shropshire, they speedily travelled the 20 miles

along the A5 to the historic old county town, Shrewsbury

*fleeting over as fine a road as ever that tempted the winged wheels of a motor car. It is straight, broad, level and nearly deserted and so late in the day we hardly need fear the minions of the law.*¹³

Roads were a channel through which the motorist and passenger were able to engage in alternate forms of sensuality in the experiencing of landscapes. Unbounded by the restrictive moulded and timetabled journey of the railway motorists could survey and freely move through the countryside as well as, or at the same time, quickly move from beauty spot to beauty spot. But for Page, Mais, Richens and Maxwell Fraser (see later) such an ability to transverse the countryside by ‘clocking up the miles’ did not necessarily equate to a greater understanding or enjoyment of it, Richens in the GWR magazine argued that

*life in the Cotswolds is peaceful. Its quiet culture and harmonious beauty can only be taken in long, slow draughts and not gulped at fifty miles an hour ... travel by rail to the fringe of the Cotswolds and then go quietly through the peaceful lanes with no thought of anything so soul-destroying as a mileage schedule.*¹⁴

For GWR writers the epitome of rambling was to ‘leave the road and unlock a hidden countryside privileged only to those who tramped the narrow flower bedecked paths with every corner holding the promise of some high adventure’¹⁵. At the heart of such a debate was the opposition to the experience of the tourist sightseeing via motor car and the navigation between beauty spots. Rather, emphasis was placed upon effort and slowness as highly positive values to view and experience countryside landscapes.

Ways of ‘being in’ landscape

Aside from the avid Rambler Hugh Page, the GWR publicity department very strategically commissioned the well-known countryside writers Stuart Mais and Maxwell Fraser to write guidebooks as well. Mais and Fraser wrote rural guidebooks though, these being shire-county-wide treatises aimed at a middle-class (and likely car-owning) readership, narrating places of beauty and historic interest, very similar to ‘coffee-table’ rural literature today¹⁶. Like Page, both Mais and Fraser were sympathetic to the GWR’s key publicity aim of getting people walking through prophesising the activity of it, indeed both Mais and Fraser were keen walkers. Fraser travelled extensively undertaking research work for all of her publications and was avid in going down both cliff

and field path 'discovering' the English countryside landscape in ways that the other GWR writers ascribed to. Mais meanwhile wrote walking guidebooks for the Southern Railway, quibbling in one of them that his 'test of a good hill country walk' was that he 'should never see or hear a motor car'¹⁷ and in another evoking voyeuristic resonances by arguing that 'true England refuses to disclose her naked beauty in its full glory to any but the devout worshipper on foot'¹⁸. Fraser, the daughter of William Fraser, the GWR's publicity agent, won critical praise for her book *Somerset* (1935). The local newspaper, the *Bath Daily Chronicle* (1935) asserted that

*Miss Fraser has not been content as so many guidebook writers are to transverse the highways and take the rest for granted. It is evident that she has explored the county from end to end and has discovered for herself the loveliness that lies hidden from the gaze of the hazy sightseeing tourist.*¹⁹

Fraser and Mais both argued that walking through a countryside landscape was to know its 'soul'. Mais, writing in the guidebook *Glorious Devon*, argued that, 'the fascinations of Dartmoor are both infinite and irresistible, to get in touch with the real Dartmoor you have to walk and get lost there'.²⁰ Equally, Fraser commented about Exmoor that

*it is 'impossible to capture its free wild spirit by motoring through it, the only way is to wander over it, letting Exmoor reveal its beauties to those who seek it with an understanding heart'.*²¹

The GWR rural guidebook literature of Fraser and Mais attempted to take the tourist away from the more common holiday sights and scenes and by extension the main road, towards a hidden historic England that had to be patiently searched on foot for. For Fraser, writing in the GWR's 900 page *Holiday Haunts 1935*

*merely to make tours of the well known beauty spots by road is not to see the real Devon ... to see Devon satisfactorily one must get into the real heart of the country and in nature's way on foot, visit its secluded villages, often reached through deep shady lanes where modern vehicles scarcely pervade or over bracing moorland on a carpet of yielding turf.*²²

Wherever possible, the GWR guidebook literature of Fraser and Mais sought to narrate personal, earthly, accounts of landscape. Fraser particularly attempted to ignite the imagination of her readership. In an effort to warrant a foot-led rather than motor-led visit to the Mendips for example, she writes

there are times when the utter silence and majesty of Mendip catches at the heart and fills the mind with a

*vast awe ... the enduring grandeur of nature sweeps over the solitary traveller as he senses an almost frightening quality in its immensity. It is as though the warmth has died out of the sunshine and the small intimate sounds of birds and insects is hushed for the voice of Mendip to speak-and then a tiny hamlet or even a solitary little cottage comes as a comforting assurance. The sun is again warm and comforting and the birds sing gaily in the unclouded sky... and ever afterwards in some indefinable way Mendip seems a part of the traveller's very existence, a strange and precious heritage...that those who keep to the great highways or the network of roads never fully sense the strange wild soul of the hills.*²³

Fraser has rather effectively written the reader into an experience of a foot apprehension of the Mendips. In the extract, a feeling of abandonment and loneliness encapsulates the walker as she/he dwells further within the sweeping scenery. Warmth, sunshine, the gentle din of birds becomes submerged beneath what the landscape is beginning to be *perceived* to be, a confining debilitating space. However, once the sight of a cottage is spotted in the distance such thoughts gradually recede as the traveller's feelings of abandonment and loneliness are superseded through the knowledge that s/he is not alone. Such experiences, for Fraser, and obviously the GWR, are something that those who move on the road never really get to 'fully sense'²⁴. The formal influence of Fraser's work and in particular her stylistic narrative tone can be evidenced through some of the newspaper reviews that her '*Somerset*' work garnered. The *Bath Daily Chronicle* quoted the cited extract²⁵, the *West Somersetshire Free Press* commented on the 'fresh angle and perspective through which Maxwell Fraser writes'²⁶, whilst the *Tenby News* dwelled on her 'eluded gift of describing the salient features of the countryside in apt and picturesque language, painting word pictures'²⁷. The *Western Daily Press* and *Bristol Mirror* thought that 'the whole book will add pleasure to a stay in any of the famous county holiday resorts or to ramble amid its rural beauties'²⁸.

Tying things up

In inter-war Britain, British railway companies made substantial profits from the marketing of the Britain's countryside landscapes, being involved in the wholesale exploitation of rambling. As this article has outlined, in doing so, the GWR within its written publicity materials attached itself to a particular way of experiencing 'Rural England'. With 'concrete, rubber and petrol' then in the process of turning the tables on 'steam and steel',

the GWR, under pressure from the increasingly popular pastime that motor-touring by motor car brought, within its written publicity materials sought to counter this 'turning' by the encouraging of a particular way of 'moving through' and 'being in' a countryside landscape that was actively narrated against the new ways of apprehending it that the increasingly popular pastime of motor-touring by motor car brought. The motor-car was presented as conduit that allows the performance of queried ways of seeing and experiencing 'Rural England'. The only solution to the overcoming of this queried performance was to seek the physical and visual experience of walking. In effect, this article has sought to trace a constructed anti-motoring and pro-rambling discourse within GWR written publicity materials, 'constructed' by the GWR in the sense that motoring, of course, is by no means a banal experience, rather just bringing alternative forms of sensuality in our experiencing of landscapes. Understanding the GWR's written publicity materials as 'texts', with the idea of 'texts' as being conducive canvases through which ideas and opinions can be shaped, this article has sought to turn some attention to the representation of motoring and the road and in so doing highlight the culturally charged and politicised nature of representation.

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Roads & Road Transport History Association

A Company Limited by Guarantee № 5300873. Registered Office:- 100, Sandwell Road, Walsall, WS1 3EB

Company Secretary:- J Howie

www.rrtha.org

PRESIDENT:

Professor John Hibbs OBE

CHAIRMAN:

Dr Robert McCloy
32 Marina Villas, Swansea SA1 1FZ
robert.mccloy36@sky.com

to whom general correspondence may be addressed

TREASURER :

John Howie
37 Balcombe Gardens, Horley RH6 7BY
mygg37@tiscali.co.uk

EVENTS ORGANISER:

John Ashley
6, Cefn Glas, Tychoch, Swansea SA2 9GW,
John@GlobeSpinner.net

to whom membership enquiries should be addressed

JOURNAL EDITOR:

Peter White
13 Lingwood Gardens, Isleworth, TW7 5LY
whitep1@westminster.ac.uk

to whom articles and letters for publication should be addressed

ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER:

Philip Kirk
11 Pickenfield, Thame OX9 3HG
philip.kirk125@btinternet.com

RESEARCH COORDINATOR:

Tony Newman
16 Hill View, Bryn Y Baal, Mold CH7 6SL
toekneenewman@googlemail.com

ACADEMIC ADVISOR:

Professor John Armstrong
42 Inglis Road, Ealing, London W3 3RL
john@johnarmstrong.eu

ASSOCIATION MATTERS

From the Chairman

A word of explanation is due. Lest perceptive members suppose that the Association's centre of gravity, by sleight of hand, has permanently moved westwards, Let me explain what has happened. Our founder, Professor John Hibbs, in making it clear that it was high time for me to come to the aid of the party, set in train a series of developments. Attending a Fellows' Dinner at the University of Wales Saint David, with which institution I have been long associated, my wife and I happened to be seated next to Professor David Warner, Vice Chancellor of Swansea Metropolitan University, on the occasion of his being made an Honorary Fellow. Falling into conversation, and confessions made concerning the Association, David observed that he and our Founder had served together in higher education, that there was none greater in the land for transport studies than Swansea Metropolitan University, and that he would be only too pleased to collaborate with the Association, to mutual benefit. As in much higher education, re-organization is taking place which includes the union of Swansea Metropolitan with the University of Wales Saint David, whose Vice Chancellor, Professor Medwin Hughes, has also warmly supported collaboration with the Association. Discussions continue as to how best that collaboration can develop. Needless to say, hopes are high and expectations no less !

Meanwhile, elsewhere in the south Wales historical forest, John Ashley, a local Swansea historian and IT expert, has volunteered to be Events Organizer and would be willing, as an

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early venture, to direct an Association Conference / Event, in Swansea in 2013. A preliminary meeting to explore possibilities takes place on 14th August in Swansea. John has also agreed, in association with the chairman, to take on the task of membership secretary, it being hoped that it will be possible shortly to recruit locally another volunteer for that role. John Howie has kindly supplied briefing documents to facilitate the smooth transfer of that function.

The quest for a Treasurer, and Secretary, however, as opposed to Company Secretary, continues. Let consciences be pricked. As matters develop, these functions could possibly be combined with other roles. As agreed, at the last committee meeting, I have consulted Nigel Furness, who advises that he is willing to continue to host the web site, as a contribution to the Association, and update it, if supplied with material. Nigel's generous contribution is very much appreciated. John Howie kindly agreed to supply data for the Autumn conference. John Ashley, as Events Officer, is poised to take on this task and will liaise with Nigel with a view to further development of the site and the supply of material, mutually agreeing a division of labour.

As for the Autumn Dinner and Conference, the conference programme is in place and details are presented elsewhere in *The Journal*. Ken Swallow and Martin have done an excellent job in assembling a team of speakers. The dinner is the subject of an enclosed chairman's letter. The Museum has introduced a charge for all associations linked to the Museum: £72 including VAT for groups up to 30, £90 including VAT for larger groups, payable in advance. However, the corporate membership will be paid to the Association.

The Association's current major production, *The Companion*, shortly reaches its climax. Ken Swallow and Martin Higginson report that a costings draft based upon the printing and estimated distribution figures has now been discussed with our Treasurer, John Howie, and that all is reasonably set for the launch in the Spring of 2013.

Turning to a subsequent publication project, the *Tilling Group History*, at the committee's request, I sought information from Nigel Furness, who, surprisingly [to the chairman] advises that the project 'has been around' for approximately twenty years and that he is very keen to see it through to fruition. Nigel anticipates completion of the text by the year's end. The committee will need to determine the next steps, including publishing and financial arrangements, and, as necessary, clarify policy as to its role as a publisher.

Attention has been given to the Association's future programme. Apart from initiatives connected with '*The Companion*', '*The Tilling Group History*', and the AGM, two further possible events have been the subject of preliminary consideration: [i] as cited, a conference and related events located in Swansea, in association with Swansea Metropolitan University, The History Association, the new National Waterfront Museum [industrial history], and others; and [ii] a similar themed conference based upon Brooklands, Surrey, in association with the London Bus Preservation Trust and others. I visited the Trust's new premises earlier in the Summer.

The Committee identified the production and distribution of a flyer/brochure, to promote membership, as a priority. The folder version, previously produced, it is suggested, should be re-issued and updated with revised contact and publications details. Preliminary arrangements are being made for the production of copies for distribution to individual and corporate members.

In the course of taking matters forward, subsequent to the last meeting of the Committee, I and John Ashley, in seeking to obtain a better understanding of the Association's history [for we are both, in essence, newcomers] had a most valuable session in Oxford with Philip Kirk, who so admirably held the fort in the recent past and is willing to assist us in our endeavours.

Should you suspect that the bus has deviated from its route, please ring the bell and get in touch with me.

Bob McCloy, Chairman

THE REVIVAL OF ROYAL PARCEL MAIL COACHES

Dave Bubier comments:

*Although regular Royal Mail stagecoaches carrying passengers and mail by road had largely ceased by the 1860s, as described above, there were scattered references to Royal Mail having reintroduced Mail Coaches (non-passenger) for parcels towards the end of the nineteenth century. The report herewith, extracted by **Tony Newman**, details one such example introduced from Manchester.*

An illuminating, factual, account of what has become an almost forgotten chapter in road transport history, although it clearly captured the public imagination of the time. A number of references thereto were encountered in research into 'stagecoaches' and clearly it was all a part of that nostalgia for the 'old ways' alluded to. Other examples (from London) are thought to have included Oxford, Ipswich, etc.

There is also mention of a Bristol to Haverfordwest run, with the suggestion it proceeded via the 'Old Passage;' route from Pilning to Beachley. If proved factual, it would have been the first vehicular ferry across the lower Severn

The Post Office were quite late (1883) coming to 'smalls' parcel traffic, a number of private concerns such as Suttons and others, having developed a sophisticated network based on railheads and local distribution from the 1850s/'60s on. As our own 'Companion to British Road Haulage History' explains, there were eight such night services running by 1890 following the introduction of the London – Brighton route in 1887. This last was also the first to be motorised in 1905.

Comments from readers with any further information as to these operations would be welcome - please write to the Editor.



What is believed to be a view of the London - Brighton Royal Parcel Mail van, dated 1900. Note the size of the lamps used for night running!

MANCHESTER-LIVERPOOL

by

ROYAL PARCEL MAIL COACH

*'The Manchester Courier &
Lancashire General Advertiser'*
23rd April, 1890.

Rediscovered by Tony Newman

'An Old Stager', in one of those delightfully breezy books of his, which tells us all about the old stage coaches and the old stage coaching days, says *'.... is rather curious that in undertaking the parcel-post business, the Post-office have had to resort to the road again. We don't certainly see the old four-horse mail going along the road with the front boot nearly full of parcels, but see the Post-office van with a pair of horses carrying them, much to the detriment of the general carriers or companies in that line of business.'* This was written five years ago, and matters in this particular department of the General Post Office have taken a very big step forward since then. Not only has the *'Parcel Post business'* developed into undertaking of immense proportions, but we have also witnessed a return in some measure, at least, to the early days of mail coaches. It is quite true that the revival of this mode of conveyance has not brought with it a return of the *'old four-horse mail'* nor is it likely to do at any further stage of its development, and for this reason. The *'old four-horse mail'* was not exclusively a parcels or correspondence coach. It also carried its complement of passengers, who were either travelling on business or for pleasure, whereas the modern mail, however much may be regretted by those who saw, or hoped they saw, the adoption of the Royal Parcels Mail as the prospect of a return to good old-fashioned coaching days, is intended for Post-office purposes, and for Post-office purposes alone. The coaches have, therefore, been constructed on a principle quite different to that which obtained in the days of Palmer, who succeeded, after much opposition and many rebuffs, inducing the Post-office authorities to adopt the mail coach system for the more rapid transit of letters and packages - a principle which has sought to carry out to its full extent

the purely commercial object the Department has in view. The new movement, which, as have pointed out in previous articles, was inaugurated on the London and Brighton road, is at a very early stage yet. It has only just been extended to the provinces, the trial ground selected being the distance between Manchester and Liverpool, and vice versa, but there can be very little doubt that if the enterprise is a successful one - and rumour has it that the London and Brighton route considerable saving has been effected - the area of adoption will be very much widened. The service on both these routes is, at present, night one, but it is quite possible that, the authorities finding it more economical to resort to the road again; we may yet see her Majesty's mails being driven between this city and port on the Mersey at regular intervals during the day, if not with all the pomp and circumstance which attended their departure and arrival the years gone by, least with the same safety and punctuality. The Manchester and Liverpool coach has now been making the journeys between the rival cities for a little over a week, and, by the courtesy of the Inspector-general of Mails, Mr. F E Baines, I have had the opportunity of experiencing the novelty of driving on the box of one of her Majesty's mails, at the dead of night, over 36 miles of road. *'The representative of the Manchester Courier is authorised to make one journey by the parcel coach from Manchester Liverpool on or before the end of May, 1890.'* Such were the terms of the document with which I, as representative of this journal, presented myself at the Central Parcels Office, Stevenson-square a few minutes to 10 o'clock on Monday evening. Previous acquaintance with the rules of the office and with the officials themselves secured me a speedy and undisputed entrance the department, where all was bustle and activity in view of the near approach of 10 o'clock - the hour of the coach's departure. The *'authorisation'* having been scanned by Mr J F Moore, superintendent, upon whom has devolved the responsibility of working the service from this end, and the parcels having been deposited in the interior, I took my seat at the left of the coachman. It is said that on the

old coaches care was taken not to make the coachman's seat too comfortable lest he should always be asleep. There is certainly no danger of such a thing on the present coaches, as I found out in a very few seconds. The seat did not even boast a thin carpet cushion, such as have been recently introduced into our tramcars, while the back board required one to sit in a perfectly perpendicular position whether one liked or not. I was thinking of the discomforts such position would entail when the guard, with all his armament slung around him, took his seat. A moment afterwards the query of '*All right?*' asked and answered, and precisely at 10 o'clock we move out of the square. There is not a large a crowd see us off as was the case on the night when the service was initiated; but still there are quite sufficient people gathered about to necessitate some caution on the part of the coachman. We proceed at only moderate pace, owing to the dangers of the setts, down Oldham-street and into Market-street. Here our progress is slightly interfered with by the tramcars crossing into Mosley-street, and I cannot help feeling grateful that our coachman is not of so determined a turn as one of his predecessors in the old mail days who, finding the way blocked by regiment of soldiers, drove through them with the remark that '*Her Majesty's mails hold the road!*' Market-street, Deansgate, and Liverpool-road are safely steered through, and then we enter Regent-road. The whole of this thoroughfare is thickly lined on either side with the inhabitants of Salford County Borough, and we have a quite royal reception, the crowds cheering all the way. Weaste is soon left behind, and once free of the ordinary traffic, the team settle down to their work and rattle the coach along at a speed of about eight miles an hour. '*We shall have a wet journey to-night,*' remarks the coachman, as went through Weaste, and his opinion soon receives most uncomfortable verification. The '*few drops*' soon become a smart shower, and ere we reach Eccles we are driving through heavy pelting rain. This is certainly not a very pleasant beginning, and very little consolation is to be gained from the guard's statement that it's the first wet night they have had since the coach

commenced running. However here the rain is, and we have to submit to it with what grace we can. The downpour makes the travelling heavy, but the horses bend with a will to their work, and we pass through Eccles, Patricroft, and Irlam in good time. Through all these villages hearty '*Good nights*' are sent after us by large and small groups who have gathered to watch the coach pass, one good lady, so far allowing her interest in the event to outrun her discretion, as to appear at the door of her house in a costume reserved for the privacy of the bedchamber rather than for the public gaze. '*We've seen several like that,*' said the guard, when his attention is drawn to the occurrence but our modesty is saved from a repetition of the shock that night. Granite setts and street lamps disappear altogether, and then we are fairly in the country, with its macadamised roads and its darkness. The coachman, however, knows every inch of the way, and though our inexperienced eyes, rendered all the more useless, perhaps, by the dancing, shifting light thrown out by the coach lamps, cannot discern any road in the blackness before us, he takes every turn and wheels round sharp, awkward curves with professional ease and nicety which quite win our admiration. Hollins Green is our first stop, and right in front of us there is a small twinkling light peeping out, as it appears to us, from a thick clump of trees. '*That's where we change, sir,*' said the obliging Whip, and a bend of the road shows us some hundred yards ahead the stables of the '*White Swan*'. A loud blast of the horn, blown by the guard, with all the skill of Army bugler, cuts through the still air, and even before its echoes have died away we have pulled up in front of the hostelry. The change is quickly effected, the reins are once more within the grasp of the coachman, and at half-past eleven, with '*goodnight*' to a company which consists of about equal numbers of rural policemen and ostlers, we start forward for Warrington. Six miles have to be covered within the hour, but the road is a good one, and the horses are fresh, so that the coachman entertains no fear of being up to time. The rain, too, which had beaten upon us with pitiless fury right to Hollins Green, has now eased, and

the prospect was a little more cheering. We soon passed out of the area of the *'White Swan's'* lights, and then were again wrapped in darkness and solitude. At intervals thin streaks of light suddenly flashed across the road, indicating the presence of policemen, and as we overtook them there were friendly salutations, and then - darkness and solitude again. Out of the black night which hemmed us in, there loomed up something white which seemed to cover the whole roadway and bar our passage. The horses, one of which was in the coachman's phraseology, an *'artful dodger,'* with all the playfulness and fire of youth, became a little uneasy, but carefully handled they faced the mysterious object and found it was a huge furniture removing van, with white-painted back. Roused by our coachman, the driver of the vehicle pulled to the side and allowed the coach to pass, bidding us, as did so, a *'goodnight'* in tones which indicated that he had been disturbed out of his slumbers. Only one other vehicle, the driver of which had a large red and white glass lamp round his neck, was treading same road, and quickly leaving him behind, we are on the fringe of Warrington. Boulders now take the place of the easy roads we have been travelling, and, as the coach rolls along, the clattering of the horses' hoofs upon stones breaks upon the silence of the town. The horn is sounded to warn the officials of our approach, and if the peaceful inhabitants of Warrington have not already been wakened by the noise of the coach rumbling through the streets, they are effectually roused by the guard as he runs through the reveille calls on his copper instrument. He explains, apologetically, that he is rather out of practice, so that one shudders at the thought of what he might have done had he been in good form. The signal has been heard at the Post-office, and as the coach runs alongside the door 15 minutes after midnight, the officials are ready to give and to receive. Before this mutual exchange is effected, however, the Liverpool coach is heralded by sounding of the horn, and also takes its position at the Post-office. They greet one another with heartiness, and then the transfer with the Post-office being completed we

resume our journey at half-past twelve. Now we enter upon the middle ground the longest and loneliest stage of the journey. The darkness seems to have gathered in density; there is no light to break the gloom of the open country through which we are passing, and we appear to be hemmed in by great walls of blackness on either side. The coach lamps burn as brightly as ever, and they cast their cheerful rays on to the road in front of the horses, but this only serves make the darkness in front blacker and more impenetrable than before. There no relief from lose sight of it for ever. The pace of the team, however, is not moderated, and we are making satisfactory progress over the roads, which are in such good condition to make it difficult for us not to realise the time when they were more like broad ditches, much and carelessly strewn with loose stones. Houses at last Houses at last take the place of hedges, and as we hurry along recognise the quaint buildings and straggling streets of one of several villages that lie between Warrington and Prescott. *'Not far from Prescott, now, sir; how have you enjoyed the journey, so far?'* queries the coachman, who has done much to make the time pleasant by retailing some of his experiences, while the guard has given us interesting particulars of his service in Jamaica with her Majesty's forces. *'Very well, indeed,'* I reply, truthfully enough, for, though blackness was the prevailing tint, the drive itself has been exhilarating, and the deep draughts of fresh air are quite delicious after the smoke-tainted atmosphere of the city. Even while our conversation is in progress, the old-fashioned village of Prescott, and in few moments we are winding up Eccleston-street, the narrow primitive thoroughfare in which the Post-office is placed, our musician at the same time giving tongue to his instrument, the echoes of whose blasts must have found their way into every nook and corner of the little village. Here the last change of horses is made, the operation being carried out at the *'Legs of Man Hotel'*. No time is lost harnessing the new team to the coach, and just as the parish church clock musically chimes out the three-quarters to two, we start upon the final stage of the journey. A long stretch of country road, beautifully wooded on both sides, and with

From: 'The Man on the Box'



John Ashley has spent his working life in IT and telecommunications, a calling which took him to live and work in several countries including four in the Caribbean. When he returned to the UK in 2005 he realised along held ambition to become a historian by taking a qualification at Oxford University. He now teaches a variety of historical subjects to adults at Swansea University and is commencing research for a PhD in July 2012. John is Vice Chair of the Swansea Branch of the Historical Association and organises history themed events at the National Waterfront Museum. In December last he published the highly successful *Ashley's Walks Around Swansea & Gower*, now with a second printing imminent.



Your comments, views and additional information are always welcome. This Your Letters column. Write to the Editor at address shown on p10.

BOOK REVIEWS



Ted Gadsby, *Who built our archive?* Omnibus Society, June 2012, ISBN 978-1-909091-00-9, 56pp, paperback. £10.

Subtitled 'Celebrating 70 years of the Omnibus Society Library and Archive, this publication is of wider appeal than its title may initially suggest. Following its establishment in 1929, the OS has assembled a wide range of unique reference material, notably in the comprehensive collection of timetables published by operators. This has relied on the efforts of many individuals over the years – a good number of whom are known directly to this reviewer – whose work is duly acknowledged. The archive also includes specialist aspects such as the ticket collection, the history of which began with the pioneering work of the Reinohl brothers, extending back over 100 years. A wide variety of illustrations, especially of operator posters and timetable covers, adds variety to the text. Following a number of changes in location, all fully described, the collection now rests at the purpose-built archive in Walsall (together with specific London material housed at the Acton Museum Depot), providing a much more secure future than in earlier periods. Appendices provide a useful source of reference for the history of the Society as a whole, including a list of all past presidents.

Peter White

Paul Lacey *The Newbury & District Motor Services Story*, 2011, ISBN 978-0-9567832-0-2, 224pp, paperback. Available from the author at 17 Sparrow Close, Woosahill, Wokingham, Berks RG41 3HT. Usual price £25, available to R&RTHA members at £15.50, including post and packing.

This must be among the most comprehensive histories of rural bus services ever published. Much of the account has obvious parallels with developments in the rest of Britain over the same period – the role of locally-based smaller operators, use of vehicles such as the Ford T and Reo, and the functions of bus services in the pre-war period (shopping and leisure, rather than education and commuting travel). However, a notable contrast is

in the limited role of larger 'group' companies, despite some operations by Thames Valley and Hants & Dorset into the town.

Although now perhaps seen as part of the London commuter hinterland, Newbury as described in this book emerges as a traditional market town, serving agricultural hinterland. The operator after which the book is named was formed through consolidation of a number of locally-based independents, and survived as a separate business until the post-war period, when it was absorbed by the Red & White group in 1951. The reliance on relatively small single deckers until quite late in the company's history is also noteworthy.

The exceptional feature of this history is the focus on the individual and families who created the local businesses, in addition to the basic history of services and vehicles. Their employment origins display a wide mix, including the traditional pattern of the horse-drawn country carrier's service adapting to motorised working, but also, for example, those who started work as chauffeurs to wealthier residents of the district. After setting the scene with a number of small operators, a year-by-year account is then given both of Newbury & District and other operators in the area from 1932 to 1951. Very extensive illustrations are provided, not only of the vehicles, but the local settings in which they operated, and the individuals described in the text. The role of excursions and tours, providing a valuable opportunity for leisure travel in the early days of motorised transport, is described along with scheduled stage services.

Perhaps the only criticism one might make is the relatively limited inclusion of maps. For those not familiar with the area, it may be useful to consult the relevant OS map when reading the text – Landranger 1:50,000 scale no 174 covers most of the area. Given the size of this volume, it offers excellent value both at the full cover price and the discounted rate offered to members.

Peter White

MINEHEAD TO EXETER

David Grimmett

Some friends asked if I would drive them from Minehead to Exeter and *'make a day of it'*. With no great time constraints I asked if they would like to explore some backroads and attempt to follow the route laid down by John Ogilby when he mapped the post roads of England and Wales in 1675. I suspect many readers have visited the Exmoor area, stretching across Somerset and Devon, but - whilst a geographic knowledge of the area immediately surrounding Minehead is useful in understanding this article - the detective work used here can be transposed to any part of the country and any lost highway.

We live in an age when travel is an everyday occurrence and journeys of 100 miles are commonplace, but in former times communities, and indeed individuals, were more self-sufficient and the prospect of travelling 45 miles from Minehead right down to Exeter would be an adventure not to be undertaken lightly. With less trepidation than our forefathers we considered how closely we could follow the route from the Somerset coast towards Exeter; but following old highways can sometimes prove a challenge as we found out within just a few miles of starting off.

The current main road from Minehead, the A39, takes you out of the town along the coastal plain, east, towards Dunster. Here, from a modern junction, the route to Exeter is easy to follow, from a navigational point, being the A396 throughout. The first town of any size encountered along the way is Bampton. A look at street map of Minehead will reveal there is a 'Bampton Street', but it is not part of the present exit route. On a two-dimensional, contour-less, map Bampton Street appears to be the start of a more logical route, heading almost directly south to Timberscombe. However, it is not difficult to understand why the modern main road does not follow this most direct route: immediately after leaving Minehead, there is a climb of nigh on 290 metres to be negotiated. This shortest route would have been taken by packhorse trains and those on foot, but once wheeled traffic became the norm the easier, flatter, route around the hill

became more attractive. The horse-power needed to pull wagons and coaches up hill is considerably greater than on the flat, extra, 'Cock Horses' would be required to help with the load for just a fairly short distance, and then there would always be a treacherous descent.

So here is your first pointer to finding a lost route. In your town of origination, try to locate a road bearing the name of your destination, or at least somewhere that is on the way. There is a pretty good chance this will usually head you off in the right direction. Town developments over the centuries have often disguised the routes we are trying to follow, so look for clues by asking the following questions: is the road you are on narrow? Do the houses lack front gardens? Do the buildings look old? Take away modern street furniture, could you then step back in time? Answer yes to these and you probably are on the right track. If we were to start our journey in Exeter and travel north, the current A396 hugs the valley of the River Exe but examination of a city street map reveals a road heading out of the centre entitled 'Old Tiverton Road'. Put 'the' in front of that name and its significance becomes immediately clear. Perhaps this might seem obvious but these roads often need searching for and sometimes yield great rewards.

Let us return to Minehead and get back to using Ogilby's map. Ground-breaking as his maps were, they did not show a representation of the landscape as does an Ordnance Survey map of today. John Ogilby's remit was to plot the main post routes used in the late 17th century. He did so in a series of strip maps showing only the route to be followed; he ignored any irrelevancies that lay off route - indeed on the map we are using there is no indication that Minehead is on the coast! He did, however, introduce one key element to his maps that has been used ever since. Distances were shown on them in a standard, universally accepted, mile of 1,760 yards. Prior to this the notion of "Devon" miles or "Country" miles meant distances were, at best, vague. Highways today are strictly delineated, the 'track' is surfaced, and invariably the boundary of the highway is set by fences or hedges, but take a look at Ogilby's map and you can see that after just over 1 mile out of Minehead the solid borders to his road become dotted lines and he has notated the route as 'pasture on both

sides.' This is a term he often used where the road crosses open moorland, over such terrain the track might 'move' with the seasons, and the exact route to be followed was not important. The maps through open countryside could be considered as simply directing travelers from one key point to the next, diverting around marshy ground, fallen trees or other obstacles. And so you have vaguely wandered out of Minehead across open country over a fairly high, steep hill and soon a valley opens out below you, not surprisingly, featuring a river. It is reassuring to learn that after passing "an Oake" on the left you can cross a brook (the River Aville) using a 'Cowbridge of stone'. Cowbridge is a name still used today and it is here that the A396 coming from Dunster and Ogilby's shorter route meet up. River crossing points are, understandably, important features on Ogilby's maps.

We now enter the small village of Timberscombe and here Ogilby shows the road running west of the church. The village is today by-passed and the main A396, takes drivers on to Wheddon Cross, incidentally the highest village in Somerset, but it is possible to go into the centre of Timberscombe and follow the old road south that was part of the Minehead United Turnpike Trust. The first route south was turnpiked in 1765, but in 1824, it was replaced by the easier route via Wheddon Cross. Was the 1765 route simply an upgrade of the Ogilby route? On the Ogilby map the village of Cutcombe is clearly shown lying some way west of his route but his map also shows the road running to the east of the church in Timberscombe, which the 1765 turnpike definitely does not. Has Ogilby made a mistake? It is unlikely that the church has moved. The two maps attached might hold the key and we

are the first generation able to tackle such riddles using a wonderful piece of modern technology: Google Maps.

By examining the satellite image of Timberscombe I found it was possible to consider two alternative routes that the road could have taken when Ogilby was mapping. The two images taken from Google Maps show firstly the 1765 turnpike and, on the second map, the two possible alternatives. As you approach the village, from the top of the map, the current road turns slightly to the left, but on the computer screen a hedge betrays an old trackway. By following the hedges and visible footpaths across fields it is possible to discover what could have been the route in Ogilby's time, or an equally plausible alternative that runs through the centre of the village. Using either route adheres to Ogilby's instruction of travelling west of the church and both rejoin the track that became the 1765 turnpike after less than a mile.

This is modern technology at its best since without the aerial view it would be almost impossible to locate this historic route. So have a go at searching out an old highway in your locality but do your homework in front of the computer with the aid of Google Maps, a technical wonder of which, I am sure Ogilby would approve. Our journey through to Exeter took considerably less time than Ogilby would have anticipated, it was neither straight nor narrow. For several miles we followed old drove ways and here the original highway could be seen to be some sixty feet wide but with sections much narrower where enclosure of the land had taken place in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth centuries – but that leads on to another story completely.

ASSOCIATION DINNER & CONFERENCE

Friday 12th and Saturday 13th October 2012

As indicated in the chairman's letter circulated separately with this issue, a dinner will be held in Coventry on the evening of Friday 12th October, preceding the conference on Saturday 13th October, to be held at the Ramada Hotel, Coventry from 1100 (coffee available from 1030). Speakers on the Saturday will be:

Stephen Barber:- 'Holidays by Coach – a look at 100 years of UK coach touring'

Ian Souter:- 'The British tram: basket-case or barometer?'

Richard Mellor:- 'Haulage as the crow flew'

Glen McBirnie:- 'Rugby Portland Cement Transport'

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