

Coaching

Coaching History

The Regency period marked the beginning of the great age of coaching. From around 1810 to the 1830's coaches ruled the newly sealed roads and reached fantastic speeds of around 12 miles per hour allowing a free and easy flow of traffic, passengers and goods around the country. It seems odd that it should take hundreds of years to develop only to take off for some few decades to almost die overnight with the arrival of the train. It would be another hundred years before the roads regained their popularity again and that was due to the rise of the motor-car.



Early travellers in Britain had no choice but to ride on horseback or walk. Kings, queens and gentlefolk all mounted to the saddle. The practice had existed for generations and centuries due to technology. With the passing of the Romans the roads they had built to drive their chariots on had been lost, or not maintained, and there was little comfort in the wagons and carts available. Chaucer's ride to Canterbury is made famous by his own account of that celebrated journey. Ladies generally rode on pillions fixed on the horse behind some relative or serving man. Indeed this was common up to the time of King Charles II in the mid-seventeenth century; his account of his escape from England includes his disguising himself as a servant and riding with Jane Lane.

The first improvement consisted in a kind of rude wagon, which was, in reality, nothing but a cart without springs, the body of it resting solidly upon the axle. In such a vehicle Queen Elizabeth drove to the opening of her fifth parliament. Mr. Smiles, in his interesting Lives of the Engineers, relates that "that valyant knyght, Sir Harry Sydney, on a certain day in 1583, entered Shrewsbury in his wagon, with his trumpeter blowyng, verey joyfull to behold and see." Bad as these conveyances must have been, they had scarcely fair-play on the execrable roads of the period. Even up at the end of the seventeenth century, the roads in most parts of the country were not unlike broad ditches, water-worn and carelessly strewn with loose stones. It is on record, that on one occasion eight hundred horses were taken prisoner by Cromwell's forces while sticking in the mud. During the seventeenth century, it was common, when a long journey was contemplated, for servants to be sent on beforehand, to investigate the country, and report upon the most promising route. In 1640, the road from Dover to London was the best in England due to the amount of continental traffic continually kept up, and yet the journey of Queen Henrietta and household occupied four long weary days over that short distance.

It was not till towards the close of the sixteenth century that the wagon became used as a public conveyance, and only very rarely then. Fifty years later a string of stage-wagons had begun to travel regularly between London and Liverpool, each one starting from the Axe Inn, Aldermanbury, every Monday and Thursday, and occupying ten days on the road during summer - about twelve days in winter. About the same time, three men started every Friday morning for Liverpool, for Lad's Lane, London, with a gang of horses for the conveyance of light goods and passengers, usually reaching Liverpool on the Monday evening following.

Stage-coaches were great the next great improvement and destined to change travelling. A kind of stage-coach was first used in London early in the seventeenth century. Towards the middle of the same century they were generally adopted in the metropolis, and on the better highways around London, travelling at the rate of two or three miles an hour.

Before 1698, stage-coaches were placed on three of the principal roads in the kingdom. The original announcement for that between London and York still exists, and runs as follows: "Whoever is desirous of going between London and York or York and London, Let them Repair to the Black Swan in Holborn, or the Black Swan in Coney Street, York, where they will be conveyed in a Stage Coach (If God permits), which starts every Thursday at Five in the morning." This was only, however, for the summer season; during winter they did not run at all, but were laid up for the season like ships during arctic frosts. Even in summer, the passengers very frequently got out and walked long distances, the state of the roads in some places compelling them to do so.

With the York coach especially, the difficulties were really formidable. Passing through the low Midland counties was sometimes entirely impracticable, and during the time of floods, it was nothing unusual for passengers to remain at some town on route for days together, until the roads were dry again. Notwithstanding these drawbacks, stage-coaches increased in number and in popularity, and so decidedly was travelling on the increase, that they now became the subjects of grave discussion; news-letters encouraged or reviled them, and pamphlets were written concerning them. For instance, in one entitled *The Grand Concern of England Explained in Several Proposals to Parliament*, these same stage-coaches are denounced as the greatest evil that had happened of late years to the kingdom, mischievous to trade and destructive to the public health. Curious to know in what way these sad consequences are brought about, we read on, and find it stated that "those who travel in these coaches contracted an idle habit of body; became weary and listless when they rode a few miles, and were then unable or unwilling to travel on horseback, and not able to endure frost, snow, or rain, or to lodge in the field!"

Opinions on even such a subject as this differed most materially. In the very same year that produced the book to which we have just referred, another writer, descanting on the improvements which had been brought about in the postal arrangements of the country, goes on to say, that "besides the excellent arrangement of conveying men and letters on horseback, there is of late such an admirable commodiousness, both for men and women, to travel from London to the principal towns in the country, that the like hath not been known in the world, and that is by stage-coaches, wherein any one may be transported to any place, sheltered from foul weather and foul ways; free from endamaging of one's health and one's body by the hard jogging or over-violent motion; and this not only at a low price (about a shilling for every five miles), but with such velocity and speed in one hour, as that the posts in some foreign countries make in a day."

From this information which we have been able to gather on the subject, it would appear that the first stage-coaches were not regarded as very great improvements upon the old stage-wagons. M. Soubriere, a Frenchman of letters, who landed at Dover in the reign of Charles II alludes to the existence of stage-coaches, but he would seem to have been well acquainted with their drawbacks, as he says: "that I might not take post, or again be obliged to use the stage-coach, I went from Dover to London in a wagon. I was drawn by six horses placed in a line, one after another, and driven by a wagoner, who walked by the side of it. He was clothed in black, and appointed in all things like another St. George. He had a brave monteror on his head, and was a merry fellow, fancied he made a figure, and seemed mightily pleased with himself."

The speed at which the coaches travelled was a great marvel at that time. In 1700 York was a week distant from the metropolis. Between London and Edinburgh, even so late as 1763, a fortnight was consumed, the coach only starting once a month. The intermediate Sunday was quietly spent at Boroughbridge, in Yorkshire, as much for the sake of relief to exhausted nature as from motives of piety. The first vehicle which plied between Edinburgh and Glasgow was started in 1749. It was called "The Edinburgh and Glasgow Caravan," and performed the journey of forty-five miles in two days. Two years after, another vehicle was started, and called the "Fly," because it contrived to perform this

same journey in a day and a half. Latterly, it took the daylight of one day. The average coach took two days to make the journey from Cambridge to London in 1750 - in 1820 it only took 7 hours.

About 1780 a gentleman, anxious to make favour with a young lady, learning that she was to travel from Glasgow to Edinburgh, on a particular day, took the whole remaining inside-seats, had her all to himself of course, and succeeded in winning her as his wife.

Mr. Smiles tells us that, during the last century, the Fly coach from London to Exeter stopped at the latter place the fifth night from town; the coach proceeded next morning to Axminster, and there a woman-barber "shaved the coach."

The fact was that, on any of the roads, the difference of half a day or even a day, was a small matter. Time was of less consequence than safety. The coaches were advertised to start "God willing," or about such and such an hour as shall seem good to the majority of the passengers. Thoresby tells us, that he was even accustomed to leave the coach (on the journey from London to York) and go in search of fossil shells in the fields, on either side of the road, while making the journey between these two places. Whether or not the coach was to stop at some favourite inn, was determined, in most cases, by a vote of the passengers, who would generally appoint a chairman at the beginning of the journey. Under such circumstances, we cannot wonder that disputes, especially about stopping at wayside-inns, should be of frequent occurrence. Perhaps the driver had a pecuniary interest in some particular posting-house, and would exert an influence, sometimes tyrannical, to get the consent of the passengers to a place of his choosing.

In 1760, an action was tried before the Court of King's Bench to recover damages, on the plea that, during a stage-coach journey, the driver wished to compel the passengers to dine at some low inn on the road. They preferred to walk on to a respectable inn at some little distance, and desired the driver to call for them, as he must pass the place. Instead of doing so, he drove past the inn at full speed, leaving them to get up to London as best they could. The jury found for the passengers 20 pounds damages. On another occasion, a dispute arose, which resulted in a quarrel between the guard and a passenger, the coach stopping to see the two fight it out on the road.

While yet the ordinary stage-coach was found equal to all the requirements of most of the old coach-roads, the speed at which it travelled did not at all satisfy the enterprising merchants of Lancashire and Yorkshire. In 1754, a company of merchants in Manchester started a new vehicle called the "Flying Coach," which seems to have earned its designation by the fact that it proposed to travel at the rate of four or five miles an hour! The proprietors, at the commencement, issued the following remarkable prospectus: "However incredible it may appear, this coach will actually (barring accidents) arrive in London in four days and a half after leaving Manchester." Three years afterwards, the Liverpool merchants established another of these "flying machines on steel springs," as the newspapers of the period called them, which was intended to eclipse the Manchester one in the matter of speed. It started from Warrington (Liverpool passengers reaching the former place the night previous to starting), and only three days had to be taken up in the journey to London. "Each passenger to pay two guineas--one guinea as earnest, and the other on taking coach; 14 pounds of luggage was allowed at 3d per pound for all luggage in excess." About as much more money as was required for the fare was expended in living and lodging on the road, not to speak of fees to guard and driver. Sheffield and Leeds followed with their respective "flying coaches," and before the last century closed, the whole of them had acquired the respectable velocity of eight miles an hour.

These flying coaches were the precursors of a great reform effected by a man of energetic nature in 1784. John Palmer, a person of substance at Bath, having been pleased to establish and conduct a theatre there, became strongly impressed with a sense of the antiquated system for both sending human beings and letters along the road between his town and the metropolis. He often desired to have occasional assistance from a London star, but was balked by the dilatoriness of the coach-travelling. Even to communicate with the London houses was insufferably tedious, for then the post starting in London on Monday did not reach Bath till Wednesday. Palmer travelled all over the country, and found everywhere the same insufficiency; he memorialised the government; he took means to inform the public; he clearly showed how easy it would be to effect vast improvements tending to economise

the time and money of the public. As usual, he set down as a half-crazed enthusiast and bore; the post-office authorities were against him to a man; even those who saw and admitted his data, could not be brought to say more than that, while sure on the whole to fail, his system might give a slight impulse in the right direction. It was only through the enlightened judgment of Pitt, that he was able to commence, in the year mentioned, that system of rapid mail-coaches which lasted up to the days of railways.

The first mail-coach in accordance with Mr. Palmer's plan, was one from London to Bristol, which started at eight in the morning of the 8th of August 1784, and reached its destination at eleven at night. The benefits to the public quickly became too manifest to be denied even by the most inveterate of his opponents, and--mark the national gratitude! The government had entered into a regular contract with him, engaging to give him two-and-a-half per cent upon the saving effected in the transmission of the letters. It was clearly shewn soon after that this saving amounted to 20,000 pounds a year. Parliament, however, would not vote the fulfillment of the bargain, and Mr. Palmer was cheated with a grant of only 50,000 pounds.

The New Coaching Industry

Following Mr Palmer's innovations there were improvements to the design of coaches and in the [roads](#) which helped rapidly improve the speed of coach trips and while the coaching industry boomed from 1820-30 and created many bankrupts and few millionaires.

The coaches of this new age had stages that averaged 8-10 miles in distance or about an hour in travel time - they tended to have longer stages for longer routes so while the London to Edinburgh route the stages averaged 14 miles, London to Brighton the average was about 10 miles.

There were numerous costs, for instance, coaching operators rarely owned their own coaches, instead they leased them from Coachbuilders at a charge per "double mile" (that is the distance to and from a place). In 1830 it cost around 130-150 pounds to build a stage coach. Each route demanded at least 4 coaches, an up coach, a down coach and a spare at each end in case of breakdown so the Tally Ho, or The Age were not one vehicle but many. Also the names would be used on many different routes and by different proprietors (such as the Tally Ho). Then there was cost of stabling, taxes on the coach, coachmen and guards to be paid, and road tolls. It was estimated that coach must make some 4 -5 pounds per double mile on average to survive.

Travelling in 1815, Joseph Ballard gives a clear picture of costs and the effect of competition on the growth of coaching during the Regency times.

"The stage fare from Manchester to Liverpool, distance forty miles, is only six shillings. This is caused by the strong opposition, as there are eight or ten coaches continually running between those places. Besides the fare in the coach you have to pay the coachman one shilling per stage of about thirty miles, and the same to the guard whose business it is to take care of the luggage, &c. &c. Should the passenger refuse to pay the accustomed tribute he would inevitably be insulted. You must pay also, at the inns, the chambermaid sixpence a night, the "boots" (the person who cleans them) two pence a day, and the head waiter one shilling a day. The porter who takes your portmanteau up stairs moves his hat with "pray remember the porter, Sir." In fact, it is necessary in travelling through England to have your pocket well lined with pounds, shillings and sixpences, otherwise you never can satisfy the innumerable demands made upon a traveller by landlord, waiters, chambermaids, and coachmen, &c. &c. My bill at Manchester for one supper, a dinner, a breakfast, and two nights lodging was five dollars. The beds at the inns are surprisingly neat and clean. In many of the inns in a large town, the chambermaids furnish the chambers and depend upon their fees for remuneration. The stagecoaches are very convenient and easy. No baggage is permitted to be taken inside, it being stowed away in the boot places before and behind the carriage for that purpose. Here it rides perfectly safe, not being liable to be rubbed, as they ride upon the same springs that the passengers do. A person can always calculate upon being at the place he takes the coach for (barring accidents) at a certain time, as the coachman is allowed a given time to go his stage. The guard always has a chronometer with him (locked up so that he cannot move the hands) as a guide with regard to time."

Finally, this quote is from the 1760/70's and is about the hasty way King George III travelled. It might seem incredible to us where the average speed on slow roads is at least 30 miles per hour and skateboarders, rollerbladers and cyclists can easily travel close to 14 miles per hour - often on footpaths. (Read more from the Regency Collection's [Coaching Resources](#))

It is doubly hard to conceive that people would not have time to thrust themselves out of the way. There would be the noise of at least four galloping horses, the jingle of harnesses and roll of hard wheels and unsprung carriage against the road users would get fair warning of an approaching vehicle. However the issue of speed remained a constant cause of complaint throughout the following century also. I guess the pace really was a lot slower then.

"It is remarked of their majesties that when they travel on the road they go with the greatest speed manageable....They could not have gone at less than 14 miles per hour. This is the usual pace at which they go.....several persons at different times have been thrown down and hurt not being able to get out of the way soon enough."

The Bath Road

8PM - Leaves GPO

Arrives at Gloucester Coffee House on Picadilly to pick up passengers

11 miles to Brentford at 920pm

46 miles to Thatchman allows 5:25 minutes and is there at 2:45 am with 20 minutes for refreshments - off again at 3:05 am

21.5 miles to Marlborough arrives at 5:45 am 2 hour 40 minutes travel time allowed - gives in timepiece (this was to check the time to make sure all was running to time and the watches were correct)

13 miles to Calne allow 1;25 minutes arrives at 7:10am

32 miles to Bristol arrives at 11am (Bath 2 hours before that) In winter it arrived at 11:45

Coaches go 'down' to Bristol and 'up' to London

The following are two quotes of the roads of Britain in 1810, both from an American visitor, Simond. The first describes his travel through secondary roads leading to Bath, that is the roads that were not on the main coaching routes:

"The roads are far from magnificent; they are generally just wide enough for two carriages; without ditches, not deep. A high artificial bank of stone and earth, with bushes growing on the top, too often intercepts all view beyond the next bend of the road, not a hundred yards of which is visible at one time. The horses are in general weak and tired, and unmercifully whipt,--so much so, as to induce us often to interfere in their behalf, choosing rather to go slower than to witness such cruelty."

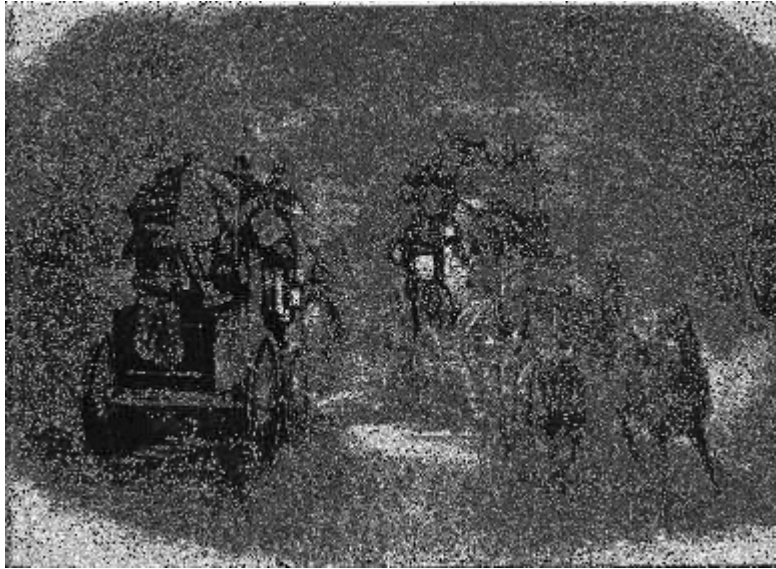
However, after leaving Bath and on one of the main Post roads to London he is left with a far more favourable impression of the country, and its roads;

The country is beautiful, rich and varied with villas and mansions, and dark groves of pines,--shrubs in full bloom, lawns ever green, and gravel walks so neat,--with porter's lodges, built in rough-cast, and stuck all over with flints in their native grotesqueness; for this part of England is a great bed of chalk, full of this singular production (flints). They are broken to pieces with hammers, and spread over the road in thick layers, forming a hard and even surface, upon which the wheels of carriages make no impression. The roads are now wider; kept in good repair, and not deep, notwithstanding the season. The post-horses excellent; and post boys riding instead of sitting. Our rate of travelling does not exceed six miles an hour, stoppages included; but we might go faster if we desired it. We meet with very few post-chaises, but a great many stage-coaches, mails &c. and enormous broad-wheel waggons. The comfort of the inns is our incessant theme at night,--the pleasure of it not yet worn out."

Below - two coaches meet at night on the road. If you look at the coach on the left you can clearly see the guard. Guards were only carried by the Mailcoaches and were there to make sure the coachman

kept to the Post Office's strict timetable, and that the mail was not tampered with. Therefore there were no passengers were allowed to sit with him or keep him company unlike the coachman. Below the guard's seat, you can see the box where the mail was locked away for safety.

Lamps on the side of the coach behind the coachman shed some light on the road, but maintaining 10-12 miles per hour through the night was still a great feat.



Turnpike Trusts

The 18th Century saw more than 1,007 turnpike acts were passed. It was the main means of improving the road system by taxing people who used the roads. So what were these acts, why were they necessary and what did they do?

Essentially the upkeep of the roads were the business of the Parish, and the Turnpikes allowed them to exact a toll on users of those roads in fit proportion to the wear. As the roads were muddy, rutted swamps in winter and just plain rough in summer, it was thought the toll would improve the roads. Turnpike trusts were empowered by Parliament to: raise loans for road repairs, build tollhouses, erect gates and milestones and each trust would often consist of a local lawyer (as clerk), a treasurer and a surveyor, together with many of the landowners through whose land the road passed. There were still complaints on some roads about the state of the road surfaces and much depended on the integrity of the trustees but for the most part the state of the roads did improve.

Tolls were originally based on the size of a vehicle (and number of horses drawing it) or the number of animals in a drove. However, it soon became evident that the size of vehicle was not the only factor in causing damage to road surfaces and Acts were introduced to charge tolls based on the weight of the load and occasionally weighing machines would be built by certain gates. This allowed a ticket to be provided indicating the weight of the vehicle which could then be produced each time a vehicle passed through a gate subsequently.

Daniel Defoe comments on Toll gates in the early years of the eighteenth century;

"...Turn pikes or toll bars have been set up on the several great roads of England, beginning at London and proceeding thro' almost all those dirty deep roads in the Midland Counties especially; at which, turn pikes all carriages, droves or cattle and travellers on horseback are oblig'd to pay an easy toll; that is to say, a horse a penny, a coach three pence, a cart fourpence, at some six to eight pence, a wagon six pence, in some a shilling. Cattle pay by the score, or by the herd, in some places more. But in no place is it thought a burthen that ever I met with, the benefit of a good road abundantly making amends for the little charge the travellers are put to at the turn pikes..."

However they weren't universally popular people rioted against toll tax in 1726.

The main turnpike roads for Mid & North Devon in 1795. The majority of the turnpike roads followed the ancient 'ridgeways' and have been continuously in use since pre-Roman times. These roads, which formed the principle coaching routes, were maintained to carry wheeled traffic by Turnpike Trusts who recovered the cost through the charging of tolls. Until 1815 only about 700 miles were maintained by the trusts - this out of the something around 6000 miles of roads for wheeled traffic in Devon at this time. But it paid to stay on the Turnpike roads for travelling off them was slow, uncomfortable and risky. In addition to these roads there were also thousands of miles of tracks and farmway suitable only for packhorses.

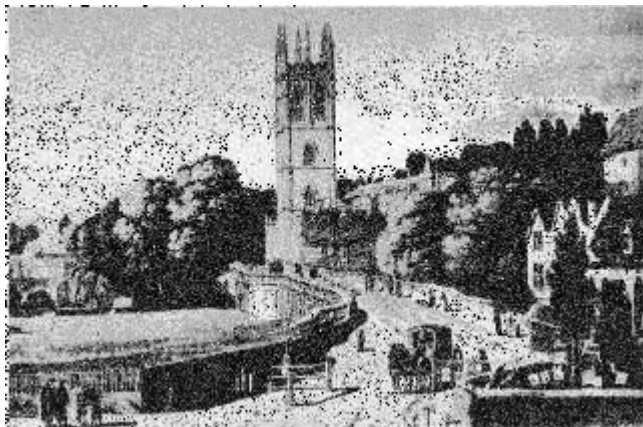
For much of Devon in the early nineteenth century the packhorse was the only way of transporting goods to and from the villages lying off the turnpike roads. Some villages did not even have a single wheeled cart by 1800, all transport being by pack horse or oxen dragging a yoke. A farmer situated at the bottom of a hill would often keep a pair of oxen available for hire to haul wagons up the hill where horses were unable to do so. Many villages and hamlets were therefore quite isolated and totally self sufficient.

Turnpike Gate House was erected by the turnpike trust - the trust itself was set up in 1754 to manage roads from Alcester to Feckenham (the present Droitwich Road) and to Tandebigge (the present road to Sernal - Crabbs Cross - Bromsgrove).

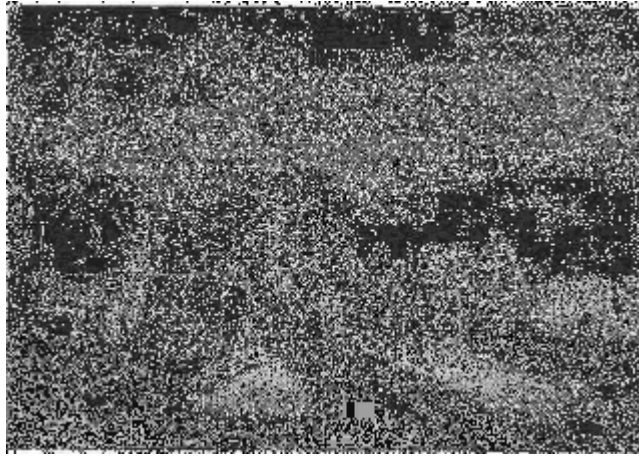
At first there were no permanent tollhouses and the gates were closed at night, but once it became apparent that the turnpikes were not temporary, then tollhouses were built at road junctions with a clear view of the gates and roads. However, there were still complaints that gates were found locked because the keeper was missing or that he was drunk or asleep. The wages of 9s per week did not always encourage the right sort of staff. This changed in the 1770's when the operation of the turnpikes was "farmed" out to the highest bidder at auction (an early example of privatisation). This meant that the "farmer" paid annual rent to the trust, but kept the tolls collected. He would either run the tollgate himself or appoint a gate-keeper.

Brief History and Description

From the seventeenth century there was a marked increase in wheeled traffic on British Roads and virtually every part of the country became connected by regular carrying services. However where possible people used water transport such as rivers, sea, or in the mid-late eighteenth century, canals. The roads were rutted, muddy quagmires at times almost impassable. You can imagine the difficulties horses must have had dragging heavyloads through these muddy, unsealed roads. It was much more efficient and often faster to send them by water, also much heavier cargoes could be sent.



The Turnpike Trust was the principle means for road improvement in the eighteenth century. These trusts fixed gates across roads and charged tolls to road users that was for the upkeep of the roads. The picture to the left is of the Oxford Gate As there was no actual surface to the roads even the pike roads were still not very good, although admittedly better maintained than the non-pike roads. By 1770 there were some 15,000 miles of roads covered by Turnpike Trusts in England and Wales, however a journey from London to Cambridge at this time still took two days to complete.



Between 1815 and 1836 there was a road making revolution and it was brought by John MacAdam. He invented a whole new concept of road making - putting a new surface on the roads. This surface was simply base of compacted broken stone under drainable surface. The difference from the old rut-ridden muddy quagmires was phenomenal - these new roads were said to have been 'macadamised'. These macadamised roads made a startling difference, journey from Cambridge to London which in 1750 had taken two days, only took 7 hours by 1820. Coaches could now be built lighter and were known to travel at the alarming speeds of 10 miles per hour *including* stoppages. Stage lengths were from 5 to 15 miles depending on the type of country but it only took one to two minutes for a coach to change horses on the road. Passengers were let out at set inns along the route for breaks which were between 10 and 25 minutes. You can find out more about the history of coaching or Mail coaches also other links from those pages on coaching generally.

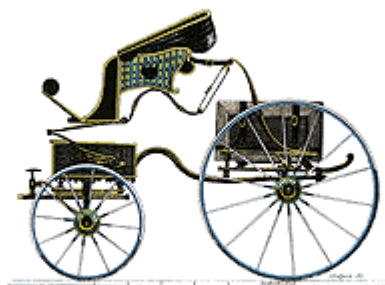
There was a coaching boom in from around 1810 to 1830 and some 3,000 coaches took to the roads during this period mostly to transport people. It was still more efficient and cheaper to send goods by canal. The coaches never really took over from the canals for transporting bulk freight, and then in the late 1820's early 1830's came the boom in railroads which took over on the freight transport from Canals. You can read a little about the early development of Steam Engines during this period.

Types of Coach

Four Wheelers

Phaeton: In 1755 the first 'high flier' was made. Generally four horses were needed to drive one but some used only two. Phaetons were a fashionable vehicle of choice in the Regency, they had large rear wheels, and a bench over the front wheels. I have heard that they sometimes had a hood that could be raised or lowered but I can't confirm if this was so during the Regency time.

Pictured below is a large Crane neck phaeton from 1796.

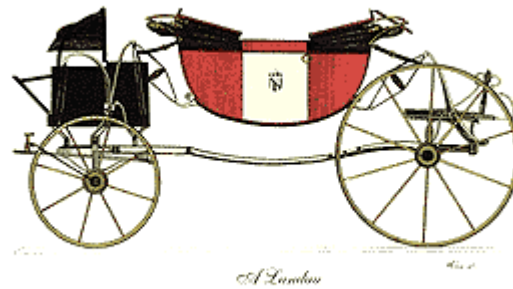


A Large Crane-Neck Phaeton

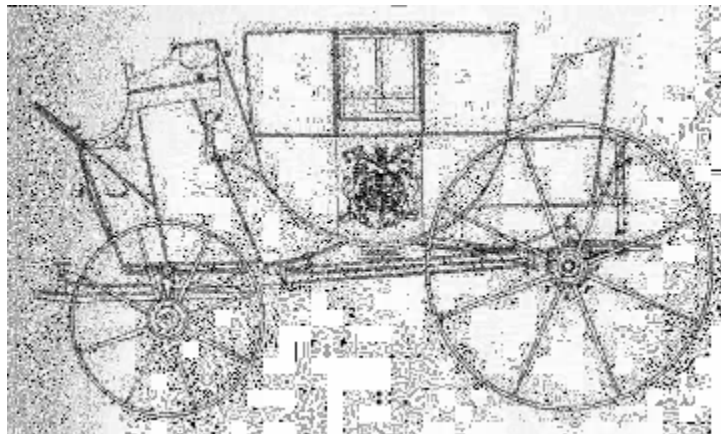
Barouche - these were hung so near to the ground you don't even need a box to climb up in to it - the coachman sat up in front and much higher than the passengers.

Landau - these vehicles first came into fashion around the 1790's. They were an open carriage capable of seating four people. As a general rule a coach was just a landau with an immovable top

The image below is a landau from 1796,



This is the specification for a mail coach from 1786 - the similarities in design with the landau are evident.



Landaulet - an offspring of the Landau but with seating only for two

Two Wheelers

Curricie - this was drawn by a pair of horses but different to the preciously mentioned coaches it only had two wheels. The whole was a very light - more a showy thing It was ousted by the cabriolet.

Cabriolet - came in the 1815. This was a one horse chaise in a newer more elegant form than the curricie. It had room for two people and came with a movable hood. It was possible to close the curtains to gain privacy and also had the advantage that one of the fashionable 'Tigers' (a small boy) could be carried behind but cut off from communication. Its shape resembled a nautilus shell and there is a knee flap with a graceful curve to it - even the shafts were curved.

This was a very showy vehicle - ornamental and most expensive of all the single horse vehicles. The advice of the day was that it needed a horse of less than 16 hands high and that the horses action could never be deemed too extravagant.

A dog cart generally replaced the cabriolet

Stanhope - 1815. This vehicle needed a smaller less flashy horse than the Cabriolet and the groom sat to the left of the driver.

Tilbury - 1815 - it was higher than the Stanhope using 7 springs instead of the Stanhope's four - it was still heavier.

The Dennet - named for Miss Dennet who was on the stage around this time 'her elegant stage dancing' this was a simple open railed chair fixed on shafts and supported by two side springs - it was one of the early forms of the dog-cart.

Coaching life

Mr Thorpe is very revealing on carriages in Jane Austen's book, "Northanger Abbey".

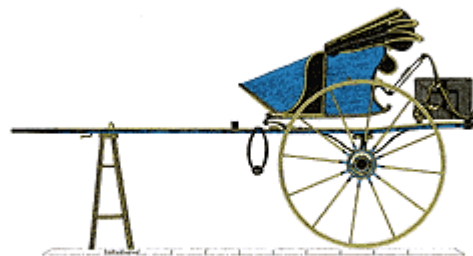
He has purchased a gig which is just a month old which he describes as 'curricle hung'. He goes on to say "seat, trunk, sword case, splashing-board, lamps, silver moulding, all you see complete, the iron work as good as new, or better." The whole cost him only 50 guineas.

We cannot take Mr Thorpe as a good judge of vehicle or horses though. There is some dispute on time and distance it took him and his travelling companion, Mr Morland, to reach Bath. While Mr Morland believes that they have travelled the 23 miles to Bath in some three and a half hours, Mr Thorpe is adamant;

"Three and twenty!" cried Thorpe; "Five and twenty if it is an inch. Morland remonstrated, pleaded the authority of road-books, inn-keepers, and mile stones; but his friend disregarded them all. He had a surer test of distance. "I know it must be five and twenty," said he, 'by the time we have been doing it. It is now half after one: We drove out of the inn yard at Tetbury as the town clock struck eleven; and I defy any man in England to make my horse go less than ten miles an hour in harness. That makes exactly twenty five."

"You have lost an hour," said Morland.

Pictured to the below is a chair backed Gig.



A Chair-Back Gig

Postillions



This picture shows how postillions worked on post-chaises and other carriages. If you squint at the bright yellow carriage coming in from the right of this picture you can see that there are two men inside and two men on the back. There isn't in fact any coachman at all.

The whole thing is being driven by two postillions. One on each pair of horses. The pair of horses nearest the carriage are called the 'wheelers' and the other pair are the leaders. In this picture we can see the postillion mounted on the grey leader, visible behind the small brown horse pulling the gig at the front of the picture.

Sometimes a four horse carriage would be driven by a coachman and there would be a postillion mounted on one of the leaders.

There were a number of ways one could travel by hired vehicle in Britain. You could buy a place in a stage or in the more expensive (and generally more reliable Mail coach) or you could travel 'post'.

A post, or post chaise was a hired private vehicle for longer distances. It didn't have a coachman but rather a postillion who sat either on one of the horses, or on the cross bar to direct the team.

Simond, a traveller to Britain describes the process, and the rate of Travel. Remembering he is currently on secondary roads travelling from Falmouth to Bath so the going is much slower and the inns, carriages and horses probably of secondary standard.

"We left Falmouth this morning, in a post-chaise, fairly on our way to London. The country is an extensive moor, covered with furze, a low, thorny bush evergreen, browsed by a few goats and sheep; not a fourth part of the surface is inclosed and cultivated. The total absence of wool is particularly striking to us, who have just arrived from a world of forests. It gives, however, a vastness to the prospect, and opens distances of great beauty; hills behind hills, clothed in brown and green, in an endless undulating line. The roads very narrow, crooked, and dirty continually up and down. The horses we get are by no means good, and draw us with difficulty at the rate of five miles an hour. We change carriages as well as horses at every post-house; they are on four wheels, light and easy, and large enough for three persons. The post-boy sits on a cross bar of wood between the front springs, or rather rests against it. This is safer, and more convenient both for men and horses, but does not look well; and, as far as we have seen, English post-horses and postillions do not seem to deserve their reputation."