

Coach Traffic in Nineteenth Century Emsworth

Personal passenger carrying vehicles were rare before the 17th century, but gradually their numbers increased as the century neared its end; before that one walked, rode a horse or used a sedan chair. By around 1800 road transport was growing with the development of carts and carriages replacing packhorse and wagon transport, and coach travel, although slow, often uncomfortable and sometimes dangerous, was rapidly increasing in popularity. Individual unaccompanied journeys were not undertaken lightly, however.

Highwaymen, often called "collectors", vagrants and cutpurses roamed the countryside in search of easy pickings on the better-used roads, especially those with long stretches between coaching stops, or on hills and passes which made the horses slow down, such as Portsdown or Butser Hills. Any traveller, tradesman or farmer returning from a market or fair with money in his pocket was also vulnerable. Jack Pitt, a local footpad known as "The Gunman", armed with a fowling piece, tried to hold up George Chatfield, riding from Havant to his home in Emsworth on 23 February 1807. Chatfield, refusing to hand over his money, was shot but managed to escape and later recovered from his wounds, offering a 200-guinea reward for his assailant's capture. Pitt also stopped and robbed Mr. King, a plumber of Havant, of his silver watch on the Horndean to Rowland's Castle Road on 20 April that same year. Pitt then moved to Portsmouth where he was recognised and charged with Mr. Chatfield's and numerous other local robberies at Winchester Assizes, later being publicly hanged on Southsea Common as a warning to others.

By 1804 coaches were equipped with springs and later on solid rubber tyres were introduced. As a result of the Turnpike Trusts roads too began slowly to improve, Emsworth lying on the Chichester to Cosham Turnpike. The Trust improved conditions so much that at the time of the Napoleonic Wars the journey time from Portsmouth to Chichester had been reduced from the better part of a day to between two to three hours by coach and under two hours by post chaise. A great many stage coaches were given reliable-sounding names, two passing through Emsworth being *The Independence* and *The Defiance*; others, like *The Comet*, *The Meteor* and *Telegraph* engendered a sense of speed and dash. For many years the professional coachman was 'king of the road', often well tipped and treated by his passengers before stopping in Emsworth at the *Three Crowns*, *The Ship*, *Black Dog*, *Golden Lion*, *White Hart* or *Dolphin*, some supplying stable-yard facilities, with staff which included horse-masters, grooms, farriers, ostlers, stable-lads, cooks, maidservants, boot-boys and bar staff, not to mention all kinds of provender suppliers for both travellers and horses.

It then soon became popular for Emsworth's middle-class families to have their own personal custom-made coaches, together with a domestic groom, stable-boy and coachman on their staff, enabling them to visit friends and relatives, having afternoon "airings" and shopping very much as Jane Austen describes visiting in *Emma*. In *A New system of Practical Domestic Economy* it was estimated that you

should set aside 10% of your income to be spent on horses or carriages which would mean you needed £1,000 for a 4-wheeler with horses (the coachman would be paid for out of the 8% you would spend on the wages of your male servants). If you had £600 a year you could keep two horses if your groom doubled as a footman. A gig cost £700, and an occasional groom £7 18s. If you could not quite manage these expenses you could hire a carriage for special occasions such as weddings, while wagonettes were very popular for picnics. One local company advertised, "Carriages oiled and washed at moderate charges" — forerunners of the car-wash trade. Carriages were made to order and William Forder and his son, both of North Street, would have been able to accommodate most local clients' needs, the most popular closed carriage being a brougham; open ones of the period included the barouche, berlin, landau, and phaeton. Even small farm carts required some skill to make and these were usually built by wainwrights, essentially joiners, who worked in conjunction with blacksmiths and specialist wheelwrights.

The town could also supply fly drivers plying between the station (the railway arrived in Emsworth in 1847) and inns where balls were often held. Newspapers and mail arrived on the same day and news of happenings in London helped Emsworth and other south coast towns to be better informed about other parts of Britain. English regional food delicacies like York hams, Stilton cheese, and Pontefract and Eccles cakes travelled well and people's diets began to vary. Although it was now also reasonably safe, coach travel for crinolined ladies was still squashed and uncomfortable; the Empire-line fashion must have come as a welcome boon. Three other disadvantages were that travellers did not know the size or social class of fellow passengers, and some diseases were easily spread, all possibilities which could lead to an uncomfortable journey.

Goods were sent by carriers and Emsworth advertised three services in the 1830's; Vick's wagons went to London each Tuesday and Saturday; Matthew's and Russell's carts carried farm produce and fish to Chichester every Monday, Wednesday and Friday mornings, alternating with Portsmouth on Tuesday, Thursdays and Saturdays, and brought back factory-made goods. Emsworth millers sent ground flour by road to Portsmouth and one of the most successful carriers for much of the 19th century was Mr. W. B. Foster of Steamshaw Mills, Emsworth, who dealt with local residents' small deliveries on a personal basis, but who also had contracts with large concerns such as Portsmouth Dockyard, the railway companies and Gales of Homdean.

Post Office coaches, painted in a distinctive scarlet, black and maroon livery with royal arms on the door panels, and initiated in 1782 by John Palmer of Bath, soon became a familiar sight on the roads. They travelled at between 8 and 10 mph to strict timing and soon became part of a system that was faster, better organised and more efficient than that in any other part of Europe. There were various denominations of letters, some 'privileged', and paid or unpaid. Parcel rates levied by the Post Office varied, although it accepted responsibility for their safe delivery. Uniquely in December 1836 after seven days of heavy snow the mail failed to be delivered in Emsworth, the Post Office being sited at various points during the 19th century in St.

Peter's Square and High Street. Royal Mail thieves paid for the crime with their lives but as far as is known no thefts occurred in Emsworth.

Eventually, however, the railways gradually took over from the coach, freight and passenger long-distance journeys being the first to suffer, then the transport of most fresh produce. As one of the major exports from Emsworth was that of crustacea and other fish, the railways opened up whole new and profitable markets much further inland, to which slower wagon transport could offer no competition. Apart from personal carriages, national coach and wagon usage began to wane in the 1850s and by the 1880s was all but defunct and only small localised traffic, which nevertheless provided a valuable service, managed to survive a little longer. Roads were much quieter and the only accidents were caused by people falling off their bicycles or by horses shying or bolting; the roads smelt of manure too, but the roses benefited.

Sources:

The British Postal Museum and Archive

Hampshire Telegraph

Quicksilver, A Hundred Years of Coaching 1750-1850, by RC & IM Anderson.

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