



# *Account of Purley on Thames*

## Carriers and Coaches

### *Introduction*

Coach services started in Tudor times usually by the simple process of adding bench seats to farmers carts or wagons. By the middle of the seventeenth century the traditional stage coach had developed with seats for four or six people inside and space for boxes and packages to be carried on the roof or in a trunk strapped to the back. Other passengers could be carried on top, but it was both very uncomfortable and very dangerous. Many people fell off having been numbed by the cold or from dozing and it was not uncommon for passengers to be brushed off by the branch of a tree.

The coaches would be hauled by teams of from four to eight horses which were changed at each staging post. Every effort was made to reduce the time the coaches had to wait and especially where mail coaches were concerned a complete team could be changed in a few minutes.

### *Local Coach Services*

Before the formation of the Reading, Wallingford and Shillingford Turnpike in 1763 there must have been coaches operating along the route as in part of the founding Act there are references to the existing highway noting how inadequate it was for coaches to pass. It stated 'that the road was in ruinous condition, narrow in many places and incommodius to passengers'.

The Universal Directory of Trade in 1796 gives perhaps the most detailed information of the local coach services. 'A coach to Oxford sets out from the Broad Face Inn, in the Market Place, every Monday and Friday mornings, at eight in the winter and nine in the summer; returns from thence every Tuesday and Saturday afternoon about four: passes through Purley, Pangbourne, Near Witchurch, Basselden, Streatly, Moulsoford, Wallingford, Shillingford, Dorchester, Newnham, Sandford and occasionally through Abingdon to and from Oxford. Fare, insides 6s, outsides and children half price: proprietors, Mrs Norris and Son.'

'A Reading to Oxford Coach left the Wheatsheaf in Reading every Monday and Friday in 1801 via Wallingford, departing at 9 am and returning the next day.

Adey operated a coach between Oxford and Reading in 1802-4 from the Boars Head, Butchers Row, Reading departing at nine am on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, returning at the same hour on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday from Oxford.

In 1823 a service was started between Highworth, near Swindon and London via Faringdon, Wantage, Wallingford and ran from the White Hart in Reading to Highworth three times a week taking one day to get there and another to return. It connected at The White Hart with a coach operated by Daffern and Co which went on to London.

The service seems to have a somewhat chequered history. By 1829 it was reduced to a weekly waggon run by Adey which left from the White Hart, Broad St on Thursdays going via Compton and Ilsley (ref 486). In 1840 it was back to a daily coach service but by 1844 with the coming of the railway it was again a weekly waggon run by Adams from The Angel on Fridays.

In 1823 there were two services daily between Reading and Oxford via Abingdon. One was named the Royal Dart which left the George Inn at eight each morning. The other was split into two different services known as the Dart and the Hero. The Hero came down from Oxford on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays, stopped at the George and continued to Brighton via Odiham, Guildford,

Horsham and Heckfield. It returned on the following day. The Dart operated on the other days merely between The Broad Face Inn at Reading and Oxford.

In 1830 Hone was operating two coach services daily between Reading and Oxford via Pangbourne, Streatley, Wallingford and Dorchester. The 'Dart' left Hone's office in Reading at 8 am each day except Sunday and the 'Horn' left at 5 pm. In 1834 the 'Dart' was running through to Cheltenham .

In 1836 these services were operated by R Costar and Company with licensed coaches 7208 and 7209. These both carried four inside passengers but whereas no 7208 carried eight outside, no 7209 was licensed only for five.

Also in 1836 a daily service between Wallingford and Reading and return was operated by W Hone. It was licenced coach no 7220 and carried four passengers .

In 1840 there were coach services from Pangbourne to Brighton (three days a week); to Highworth (daily); London (daily); Oxford (twice daily); Portsmouth (3 days a week); Reading (twice daily). The London coach came along the Bath Road as far as Theale and then diverted via Pangbourne to Reading. This seems to have been 'The Regulator' which operated from Bristol to London. The Brighton and Portsmouth services came from Oxford and Wallingford

A variation on the stage coach was the Sociable. This was a four wheeled open carriage with facing seats. They were used for the shorter journeys and in 1830 there was a service which left the Angel in Broad St every morning at 7.45 am travelling via Pangbourne and Streatley. In 1834 the service left Hone's Coach station at 11 King St, Reading at 11 am. In 1840 it was back to the Angel being run by Mr Pook leaving at 7.45 am and returning in the early evening

The coaches reached their peak around 1836 which was maintained until 1840 when there were no less than 14 daily coaches from Reading to Bath and beyond, 15 to London, most of which piggy backed on the railway and 17 to other destinations from Brighton to Devizes. A number of the services were sociables. The coming of the railways was the death of the stage coaches, providing a faster, more comfortable ride. Initially the coaches used to 'piggy back' on the trains between Pangbourne and London but this practice soon died out and the passengers transferred. The railways soon took over all the long distance traffic and the local connecting trips were served quite well by Local Carriers.

### *Carrier Services*

Carrier services were probably started by people who needed to travel to market anyway and carried goods for others. Thus the service often began as a side line for someone like a farmer, an inn keeper, or a local shopkeeper.

In general the carriers did not address the same markets as the merchants with their pack horses and the carters who carried bulk goods. The merchants tended to deal in one type of commodity and travelled comparatively long distances whereas the carriers carried a very wide range of goods and travelled fairly short distances, rarely more than twenty or thirty miles.

By the mid nineteenth century a well organised carrier network had been developed linking almost every village with at least one major town. The carrier operated on a weekly basis starting and finishing at his home village. Each day he would travel to a nearby market town, following a pre-defined route and stopping off to take orders, collect and deliver goods as he went. Occasionally they also carried people. There was usually an easily recognised marker to indicate that he should call, often a white flag or card.

It was possible to send goods considerable distances by carrier as they used to meet each other and the carters at the inns and alehouses where they operated from in the major towns and swap goods. The carters operated over very much longer distances for example in 1830 Hillier and May operated a wagon which travelled from Swindon and Friday returning the next day. There were many carts to

London but also to Southampton, Andover, Bath & Bristol, Devizes, Frome and Odiham.

The tradition was that the goods were paid for on delivery and thus the carrier would have a very real interest in ensuring that the goods arrived safely. How they paid each other when goods were passed on was a matter of negotiation and depended very much on trust; but any carrier who cheated his colleagues would very soon go out of business as no one would trust him in future.

Carriers were subject to no controls and no bureaucracy, they kept no accounts and dealt strictly in cash. Thus they left no written records and all we really know about them is culled from lists of their names and routes in local directories. Really the only restriction on them was that they were not allowed to carry mail, but even this they got around by bundling mail up into parcels or by doing deals with local postmasters.

In the market towns the shopkeepers used to give them commission, usually a penny in the shilling for goods they bought on behalf of clients and they levied a charge on the client as well.

The vehicles they used were usually covered two wheeled carts drawn by a single horse but many carriers had a variety of vehicles for different uses, eg bulk carriage, coal delivery, funerals, weddings or agricultural use.

In the twentieth century many of them bought either petrol or steam lorries and changed their line of business by becoming haulage contractors or bus operators. The larger operators also used traction engines used to haul trailers. These used to do a lot of damage to the roads and put undue stresses on bridges and so before long they were required to obtain a licence for their vehicles to help pay the cost of maintaining the roads.

The old carrier system lingered on until the 1940s but after the war most of them went out of business. In recent years however there has been a considerable revival with many companies operating national carrier networks using vans and motor cyclists.

### *Carriers serving Purley*

The earliest record of a carrier in Purley is when Godwin started his route between Reading and Streatley around 1790. He had an unofficial arrangement with the Reading Postmaster which became official in 1811 when he was engaged as a Post Office Messenger at a fee of 20s per week.

The route was taken over by Feather in 1817. He was taken to task by the Post Office for carrying passengers at the same time as mail in 1825. This was strictly forbidden. In 1829 the route again changed hands when Piercey took over, working from Alfred Street in Reading. Piercey was still operating in 1840, but in 1843 Mr Kidney took over from him, operating from the Friar Street Office.

In the 1850s there were three carriers serving Purley. The principal service was provided by Kidney and Vise who operated daily between the Woolpack Inn in Reading and Whitchurch via Pangbourne. In addition Mr Tegg ran from the Peacock on Wednesday and Saturday and Mr Smith from the Elephant on Saturday only.

Carriers would serve mainly their own and a few surrounding villages and not bother to stop very much en-route. However business was business and they would always be prepared to stop and call if they had the time and the space on their cart. In 1870 the list of carriers that passed through Purley at least once a week, often daily was impressive; Pike, Butter and Jane Woodley served Ashampstead; Hannah Hobbs & Mary Pottinger and Moses Saunders served Basildon; Butler and Shepherd served Blewbury; Charles Watts served Cholsey; Pickett, Compton and Ilsley; Hudson, Wantage and Faringdon; Francis Lawrence and Daniel Simmonds, Goring; Jesse Wallis, Wallingford; and Butler and William Neale served Yattendon and Pangbourne.

At the turn of the century services were provided by Smith, Taylor and Agg. Smith operated from the White Hart in Reading on Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday from at least 1891 to 1920.

Taylor from the Dukes Head daily (1891), and Agg from The Elephant daily (1920).

In 1931 Baston of Upper Basildon, Cripps of Bucklebury, Galpin of Yattendon, Lee of Horseshoe Road, Pangbourne and Nash of Pangbourne operated through Purley. In 1930 Mr Lee operated daily, except Wednesday, between the Forbury in Reading and Pangbourne.

By the war there was only Mr Lee left with a covered Ford lorry with two benches in the back. He brought supplies to and from the shops along Purley Rise and local farms. He also took the older children to school in Pangbourne and the local football team to away matches. He was a bluff Yorkshireman with a thick accent which made him almost unintelligible to the locals. He stood no nonsense from the children, many of whom were made to walk to school after being made to get off for being cheeky.

### *Bibliography*

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### *Record of Carriers*

<i>Name</i>	<i>Inn at Reading</i>	<i>days</i>	<i>destination</i>	<i>years</i>
Adey	White Hart	h	Highworth	1829
Agg	Elephant	m-s		1920
Baston		uhs	Upper Basildon	1928-35
Butler & Shepherd	Wheat Sheaf	s	Blewbury	1830
Butler	Woolpack	ws	Yattendon	1830
Butter	Black Lion	s	Ashampstead	1830
Byzes	Woolpack	m-s	Pangbourne	1840
Cheeseman	Hones Off	m-s	Pangbourne	1837
Clifford	Printing Off s			1802
Coles		uwfs		1887
Feather				1817,25
Foster	Dukes Head	ws	Goring	1840
Frame	Catherine	Wh f	Moulsford	1801

<i>Name</i>	<i>Inn at Reading</i>	<i>days</i>	<i>destination</i>	<i>years</i>
Gamons	Broad Face	u	Wallingford	1801
Godwin	Saracens Head	u-s	Streatley	1802
Harris		us		1935
Hazel	Broad Face	s	Compton	1801
Hannah Hobbs etc	Peacock	ws	Basildon	1829-34
Hudson	Woolpack	s	Faringdon	1829-34
Johnsons	Peacock	ws	Basildon	1801
Kent	Peacock	s	Ashampstead	1829,34
Kent	Black Boy	ws	Basildon	1829,34
Kidney & Vize	Woolpack	m-f		1852
Kirby	Wheel	ws	Basildon	1829,34
Knapps	Oak	s	Streatley	1801
Lane	Wheatsheaf	s	Blewbury	1840
Lannes caravan	Broad face	s	Basildon	1801
Lawrence	Elephant	ws	Goring	1829-40
Lee	Forbury	muhs	Pangbourne	1931,35
Lee	Lower Ship	s	Bucklebury	1801
Nash			Pangbourne	1928,31
Wm Neale	Black Lion	ws	Yattendon	1830
Norman	Woolpack	ws	Yattendon	1829
Picket	Black Boy	ws	Ilsley	1830
Piercey	Alfred St		Goring	1837
Pike	Peacock	ws	Ashampstead	1801,29,34
Pike	Duke's Head		Ashampstead	1830,40
Pocock	Elephant	s	Compton	1840
Rose	Oak	m-s		1802
Sargeant	Dukes Head	m-s	Pangbourne	1895,99, 03
Saunders	Catherine Wheel	ws	Streatley	1829,30,37,40
Shepherd	Wheatsheaf	s	Blewbury	1829,34
Simmonds	Catherine Wheel	ws	Goring	1829,30,34
Smith	White Hart	mwfs		1891,99, 20
Smith	Elephant	s	Cholsey	1840,52
Smith	Woolpack	s	Yattendon	1801
Steptoe	Three Brewers	ws	Cholsey	1829,34
Taylor	Dukes Head	m-s		1887,91
Vize	Woolpack	m-s	Whitchurch	1829,34,37
Wallis	Upper Ship	ws	Oxford	1829,34,40

<i>Name</i>	<i>Inn at Reading</i>	<i>days</i>	<i>destination</i>	<i>years</i>
Chas Watts	Elephant	ws	Cholsey	1829,30,34
Jane Woodley	Peacock	ws	Ashampstead	1830