



STAGE COACH: THE BRIGHTON COMET ON REIGATE HILL.
From an aquatint in colours by James Pollard.

THE ROAD IN SURREY

BY

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CHARLES APPERLEY, more familiar to his generation as Nimrod, contributed his accounts of the Chase, the Turf and the Road to Equine literature, and as I had already had the assurance to trouble our Society's Collections with accounts of Hunting and Racing in Surrey it has been suggested that I might complete the series by attempting some description of the Road. The task is a more formidable one than were those of dealing with the Chase and the Turf. The Road is a far wider subject and might cover an account of travel in Surrey from prehistoric days on the Pilgrims' Way to a record of carnage to-day on the Kingston By-pass.

So to keep my material within something like reasonable limits I decided to treat the Road from the same point of view as the Chase and the Turf. The Golden Age of driving in England ran from the end of the eighteenth century to the establishment of railways and its Silver Age from then until the days of motors. Driving is now practically extinct, riding is luckily on the increase and a little common sense in the matter of cost is popularizing polo. But whereas thirty years ago everyone could put a horse to and drive him to the station or saddle him and ride him there I don't suppose that one young man in a hundred to-day could drive or still less harness a horse, and as for riding at least 75 per cent of them are like Surtees' friend, who sat his horse with ease and grace until he began to move and then he fell off.

The first Act of Parliament to lay down a general system for the maintenance of the English Highways was passed in the reign of Philip and Mary when coaches began to be intro-

duced into this country ; but the results were not very grand and for many years afterwards the state of the roads is better imagined than described. Queen Elizabeth rarely drove, she usually rode pillion behind her Lord Chamberlain. But later in life she seems to have used a carriage as in an old account book at Kingston on Thames there is an entry of 20*d.* paid for mending the road when the Queen went from Wimbledon to Nonsuch in 1599. But our Surrey roads were in a deplorable condition many years later. In 1703 Queen Anne's husband took fourteen hours to drive from Windsor to Petworth and the last nine miles took him six hours ! In 1727 the King and Queen were a whole night driving from Kew to St. James's Palace and the coach was overturned on the way. Apparently some people kept their private roads in a better state. I have a picture at Clandon, by Knyff in 1711, which shows the approach to the house along which a coach is travelling on what is seemingly a decent road. This road is no longer in use, but I have had a section dug up and there seems to have been a fair foundation of flints. The highway from the London-Portsmouth road through Clandon to the London-Epsom-Guildford road was in such a bad condition that they constructed a private road parallel to the public highway from Clandon to the junction with the Portsmouth road in Send.

The Portsmouth road itself was kept in better condition, for in the sixteenth century " machines " left London regularly for Portsmouth. It is recorded that Samuel Pepys travelled by one of these conveyances in 1668 on Admiralty business. The machines left the Surrey side of London Bridge and went via Vauxhall (or Fox Hall as Pepys calls it), Battersea and Putney. But the journey was an adventurous one. The first stage was Guildford where apparently travellers dined, but Pepys got lost on the way and at the time he had hoped to be eating a good dinner at Guildford he was wandering about near Cobham.

But I will not dwell on the lives of travellers of comparatively long ago since my object is to describe something of the life on the roads when they were sufficiently serviceable to enable people to drive on them for driving's sake.

It was not till 1784 that the first mail-coach was started. This was the venture of Mr. John Palmer who was manager

of the Bath Theatre. He had been connected with the post office and he persuaded Mr. Pitt to give his scheme, of substituting a mail-coach for the former method of sending letters by courier on horseback, a trial, but though Palmer's system was a success to a certain extent the state of the roads was so bad that it took two days and three nights to travel from Manchester to Glasgow.

Still, bad as travelling was Palmer seems to have encouraged people to wish for better things and the post office received many applications for mail-coaches. But it was impossible to grant their requests till roads capable of being used for driving had been created.

Our driving roads are really the creation of the great road engineers Macadam and Telford. The latter was responsible for the London-Holyhead road and the former mainly for the roads in the south of England.

Loudon Macadam was an American who came to England in 1783 and was first employed in Scotland, migrating later to Bristol, whence he and his sons were responsible for the construction and improvement of nearly 1,000 miles of roads. But of course the process of Macadamization took time and it was not until nearly the end of the eighteenth century that the English roads were anything but pain and grief to drive along. But as the Macadams and Telford got to work good roads increased rapidly and more and more coaches were put on. In less than twenty years from Palmer's first attempt there were no fewer than 250 coaches passing daily through Surrey backwards and forwards to London. There were three main routes—the Portsmouth road, the Exeter road, and the Brighton road. Brighton was the creation of the Prince Regent. Until the middle of the eighteenth century it was an obscure fishing village—Brighthelmstone it was called. In those days there was a well-known doctor at Lewes named Russell who visited the place and finding the air did him good, recommended it to his patients. But the difficulties of transport were so great that few people visited it. Fourteen hours painful travelling was required to reach Brighton from London. Indeed, the roads were so bad that in some places oxen were the only beasts that could negotiate the sloughs called roads. Horace Walpole, visiting Sussex at this time, complained that

in that county there were neither inns, horses, nor post-boys ! But the Regent changed all this. He visited Brighton and found the air gave him an appetite—perhaps the salt tang in it also gave him a thirst. He decided to build himself a house there and the Pavilion was the result. Good roads were soon made, for all the fashionable people were attracted to Brighton by the Prince. There were several main roads from London, all traversing Surrey, one via Croydon, Merstham and Red Hill, another via Reigate, and a third via Epsom and Dorking. There was a fourth and longer road which was not so much used, this passed through Croydon, Godstone and East Grinstead. You could also travel through Guildford via Dorking and Horsham, this road was used occasionally by the Regent. The Lord Onslow of that time, George by name, was a friend of the Prince, indeed he was one of the witnesses of his marriage with Mrs. Fitzherbert. The Regent was also a friend of Onslow's eldest son Cranley (he quarrelled with him later) and frequently stayed the night at Clandon, going on to Brighton next day through Guildford and Dorking.

No less than fifty coaches a day passed between London and Brighton and back. Most of them were fast passenger coaches such as the Alert, the Dart, the Original Red Coach, the Royal Clarence, named after the future William IV, the Princess Charlotte and several others ; there were also three mail-coaches a day besides the heavy night coaches. So with coaches, chaises and other vehicles the Brighton road was a lively place in the early nineteenth century. But there were other attractions than Brighton to this road. The days of driving were the palmy days of the prize-ring and many of the great fights took place on Crawley Down or Blindley Heath.

The Prince, the prize-fights and the good going attracted the sporting young men of the day, who had taken up driving as a new pastime. Driving became a craze. Like all crazes it produced follies. Some of the young bucks got themselves up to look like stage coachmen. They wore heavy, ill-fitting coats, affected a wheeze as though suffering from bronchitis after driving coaches for many years in bitter winter weather—some had a front tooth extracted to spit through ! Others did not go quite so far as this but had a tooth blackened over

to look as if were missing. My ancestor, the Lord Cranley mentioned above, otherwise known as Tommy Onslow, who was one of the best amateur whips in England, poured scorn on their eccentricities though in other ways he was even more eccentric than any of them. He said that when he saw them sitting on their boxes he took them for stage coachmen, but the moment they started to drive he recognized that they were gentlemen. His object had always been to look like a gentleman and drive like a coachman, while theirs seemed to be to look like a coachman and drive like a gentleman, and he thought they had been more successful than he had.

The driving on the Brighton road was not first-class, the road was too easy and inferior performers could get along quite well, but there were good men among the coachmen. Of the professionals Sam Goodman and Cook were reckoned the best, while among the gentlemen there were Lord Worcester, Sir Vincent Cotton and Jerningham. Worcester was one of those who dressed like a stage coachman and would pocket a tip if offered him rather than spoil the illusion.

But the Portsmouth road wanted more skill. It was the old road through Surrey, climbing over the ridge at Hindhead, not running along the side of the hill as it does now. To drive a coach full of passengers and luggage day in and day out through all seasons and weathers wanted skill and nerve, and these old coachmen had it. They had to drive all sorts of horses, good, bad and indifferent, and some of the horses were vicious brutes given to kicking, jibbing, and all other forms of equine vice. A good coachman had to be a judge of his team from the moment he took the reins. He had to drive a *team*—not four horses as individuals. He had to make sure that each horse was properly bitted: that their collars fitted comfortably: heavy collars were in fashion, for it was thought that it was better that a horse should carry a few more pounds in his collar than be apt to flinch from it. A common fault with ostlers putting to was to have the pole-chains too slack; the guard or the coachman had to tighten them. All these and kindred matters a coachman had to see to when each change was made, for no man could do justice to a team improperly harnessed and put to.

I have said that a coachman had to drive a team, not four

horses. He had to drive an eager horse with a slug or a fast horse with a slow one ; occasionally his wheelers would press on his leaders. His business was to see that all his horses did their share, that there were no slack traces and no undue rattling of bars.

Handbrakes were not in use till 1835 and in the prime days of coaching everything depended on the shoe and the guard had to be an artist with the shoe as well as with the horn. For if the shoe broke—as not infrequently happened—there was nothing to do but to gallop for it, for the wheelers could not hold a heavy coach.

The Portsmouth road was devoted to more serious business than the Brighton road. Naturally a large part of the traffic was naval, and heavy coaches predominated, taking between thirteen to fourteen hours to do the journey. But there were lighter coaches also. The Rocket, for instance, took nine to ten hours. Twenty-six coaches a day ran in and out of London to Portsmouth, not including one that ran to Gosport. They all passed through Guildford, but there were twenty other coaches also out of London running to and through the town and with cross-country coaches such as those running to Brighton, Newbury, Winchester, etc., upwards of fifty coaches a day must have used the town. And Godalming was almost as busy. Hundreds of horses must have stood in the stables. A few years ago I rode an old polo pony into Guildford and wanted to stable him while I attended the bench. I had the greatest difficulty in finding anywhere to put him up. “*Sic transit gloria equi.*”

One cannot quit the Portsmouth road without some reference to crime on it. The murder of the sailor at Hindhead is too well known to need description : the stone put up as a memorial bore an inscription cursing anyone who should remove it. A little while ago the Surrey County Council widened the road and removed the stone. There was much outcry. But it had been forgotten that the stone was originally erected on the old road along the ridge and removed to the new road when that was constructed. It has now been put back in its original place, so the Surrey County Council should obtain a blessing !

One other reminiscence of the Portsmouth road. When

Nelson left England for the last time his chaise stopped at Burford Bridge, and at the inn there he slept his last night ashore. On the morrow he drove through Guildford to join the *Victory*.

The third through road which touched Surrey was the Exeter road. This only touched Surrey at Bagshot and the branch road south to Winchester and Southampton passed through Farnham. But Bagshot was an important coaching centre and a number of long-distance coaches stopped there. Indeed it was then as considerable a stopping-place as Guildford, for the same number of coaches passed through it daily. There were a number of well-known amateurs who drove on this road, such as Sir Bellingham Graham and the present Lady Onslow's forbear Sir Charles Bampfylde.

Talking of gentlemen drivers we have not many recorded from Surrey; there are only two who figure prominently. One was Lord Cranley, or Tommy Onslow, and the other Sir John Lade. But if our Surrey drivers are few these made up for it by being perhaps two of the most peculiar and typical types of a peculiar period. I need not describe them, for I have already done so in dealing with racing in Surrey.

One cannot attempt a description of the road in Surrey without some mention of highwaymen. Putney Heath seems to have been the favourite field for the operations of these gentry. London, then, was surrounded by wastes such as this, Barnes Common and Wimbledon Common on the south, Hampstead Heath on the north. This "Green Belt" was a favourite lurking-place for robbers, and as every traveller had to pass through it on his way to London they no doubt did a very good trade. They went even nearer to London and had the impudence to practise their calling on the road from Knightsbridge to Hyde Park Corner. An ancestor of mine was robbed actually in Hyde Park, coming up in his coach from Clandon. I have his carriage pistols; beautiful little weapons, not five inches long, meant to shoot point blank and carrying a heavy bullet just enough to deal with a highwayman at close range very satisfactorily.

Jerry Abershawe was our chief Surrey highway hero. He operated on Putney Heath, doubtless watching for coaches coming from the Robin Hood, where the last change of horses

before London took place. He was not hanged for highway robbery but for murder, having shot an officer who tried to arrest him. He was executed at Kennington and hung in chains in Putney Bottom.

The subject of the road during the half-century when roads were macadamized and nothing but horse-drawn traffic existed, is one of great interest—but to do justice to it, a work of many pages would be necessary. Dealing only with Surrey is difficult, for much of what can be said of Surrey can be said of any other county. During the fifty years between 1784 and 1838, the change brought about by Macadam must have been stupendous: much more considerable than the change that took place when motors began to come into use. Before 1790 travelling was purely utilitarian and people avoided it as much as possible. With coaches and good roads it became general. Then came the railways in the late thirties and early forties, and the roads became deserted or comparatively speaking so. But there was always a good deal of short-distance travel on the roads, and though the old coaching inns presented a somewhat moth-eaten appearance and the once spick and span highways showed signs of want of care, they still carried a quantity of traffic.

It is the business of the antiquarian to delve into the past and to present its true picture to the present day. Although many of us, not perhaps so very old yet, can remember the days when motors were unknown and all travel off the railways was by means of horses and bicycles, those days are as dead and gone as the chariot races in the hippodrome at Byzantium, so driving on the road before motors is a very proper subject for our research.

As regards authorities for these lines, much general information will be found in Macaulay's History and in Lecky's *History of the XVIII Century*; Gronow's and Wraxall's Memoirs are perhaps the best sources of information as to the manners and customs of the Regent and his friends, but I think that those days are much more accurately portrayed in a work of fiction—Conan Doyle's *Rodney Stone*—than anywhere else. Cary's *Travellers' Companion* is a contemporary guide to the Coaches, Roads and Inns of the early nineteenth century and Mogg's *Patersons Roads* gives a careful description

of every road in the country. The Badminton Library volume on Driving, published in 1890, deals with the subject exhaustively. The reminiscences of Edward Corbett and C. T. S. Birch Reynardson are useful pictures of the period shortly before the introduction of railways and there is much useful information in such books as Harper's *Portsmouth Road* and Tristram's *Coaching Days*. The best works on coaching generally are Harris's *Coaching Age* and *Old Coaching Ways*. I have drawn a little on my own recollections of what I heard as a child from my father and others of driving and road travel in Surrey, and I may perhaps claim to be one of the Driving Age myself, as when I was at Oxford such a thing as a motor-car was as unknown as an aeroplane.