



TRANSPORT

In 1800 Lingfield and its surrounding settlements were relatively isolated from the outside world. People either walked to where they were going or rode on horseback or used some form of horse drawn conveyance. Lanes led out from the village to Crowhurst, Oxted and Edenbridge to the north and east, and to the market town of East Grinstead to the south, and most importantly to Blindley Heath to the west and the turnpike road from London to Brighton. From Godstone it followed the line of the Roman road over Tilburstow Hill to Blindley Heath and thence to East Grinstead, Lewes and the coast. The Blue Anchor Inn became a busy coaching stop, as well as a travellers' stopover when the road to the south was impassable.

A major problem in our area was the presence of swamps and marshes due to the meandering streams feeding into the river Eden. These lie largely on an east/west axis and presented a particular hazard for north/south travellers. But by the turn of the century improvements in road construction and maintenance made by the turnpike trusts and financed from tolls on road users (there was a toll-gate at Anglefield Corner, 3 pennies per person on horseback, nine pennies for a wagon with three horses) allowed stage coaches to reach speeds of up to nine miles an hour. Local roads were a parish responsibility with 'elderly' paupers often used as roadmen. The parishes also benefited from farmers making their workers available as temporary roadmen when agricultural times were hard, as they were after the Napoleonic wars and during the poor harvests which followed.

It is fair to say that in the early years of our century the road network afforded relatively easy movement between our communities. William Cobbett travelled down the turnpike in 1821, which by then stretched from Southwark to Wych Cross (34 miles). He doubtless would have stopped off at the Blue Anchor. In his *Rural Rides* Vol. 1 he describes riding up Tilburstow Hill - a long hill of clay and sand, and then the descent into a level country of stiff loam at top and clay at bottom, with corn fields, pastures, broad hedge-rows, coppices and oak woods. He didn't think much of East Grinstead when he got there: 'a rotten borough and a very shabby place'. He did say though that the road was well maintained.

1836 saw the peak in the number of coach services licensed to serve our area. There was a daily London-East Grinstead-Brighton coach, three per week to Eastbourne and to Lewes and a daily service to connect with the Bletchingly to London coach. Stagecoaches were individually named and passengers would wait in the inns on their arrival and departure. Up to four passengers sat inside and as many as eleven outside at half fare. Dickens' Mr Pickwick usually travelled outside which occasioned much

TRANSPORT

merriment for the many bystanders who would gather to watch events as the portly gentleman clambered with difficulty onto the roof of the coach. Mail coaches were armed following a robbery in 1801 at Wall Hill near Forest Row and often travelled at speed at night. Coach traffic had to contend not only with the weather but also with a large variety of private vehicles and heavy agricultural wagons, plus herds and flocks being driven to local markets.

As the census returns show the RH7 area remained essentially a rural community throughout the century. A survey in 1841 of the East Grinstead area showed that 31% of land was arable, 30% pasture and 31% timber. Brewing was especially important as 'small beer' was widely drunk because of the unreliability, healthwise, of water generally. The need to get local agricultural produce to the growing populations around London and Croydon was one of the arguments put forward by the railway lobby when considering the benefits of railway links in the area.

Stagecoaches could not compete with the London Brighton and South Coast Railway when it started services in 1841 between London and Brighton. Whereas the stage took all day to reach Brighton the railway offered the possibility of doing the return journey in a single day with time for a swim and a decent lunch. The Brighton line also followed the more direct route via Redhill and the village of Horley, way to the west of the Blindley Heath turnpike. The cessation of through coaching services to the coast meant that local entrepreneurs began offering services to and from London and East Grinstead, some of which routed via Lingfield.

Whilst the LBSCR was the first to provide services from the south into London, their competitor, the South Eastern Railway had succeeded in obtaining parliamentary sanction to build a line to Folkestone and Dover. When the SER put in its bid it was one of several companies who hoped to cash in on the lucrative London/Cross Channel market. The fastest stage coaches took eight and a half hours to reach Dover and over nine hours to get to Folkestone. A line through north Kent offered the shortest route and opportunities to pick up additional traffic in the Medway towns. But the line would be expensive to build and was objected to by the packet companies that ran services up the Thames estuary to the Pool of London - Charles Dickens' preferred means of going to town. In the event the north Kent proposals were shelved or withdrawn. But the SER's wish to route through Oxted and Maidstone was refused and it was ordered to share LBSCR's metals to Redhill (it being thought that only one southerly route into London was necessary).

From Redhill the railway follows an almost straight line to Tonbridge. The 1836 Railway Act stipulated that bridges over turnpike roads had to be constructed with a minimum span of 25 feet and a height under the crown of 16 feet. A number of wayside stations were built including that at 'Godstone' albeit some two miles south of the village. The construction headquarters for the building of the Godstone district of the line (from Redhill to Bough Beech (13 miles 70 chains)) was at the new station and included a number of navvies' huts. More were provided at Crowhurst. The physical demands of building the railways in England in the railway mania years were considerable given that the principal tools were pickaxes, shovels and wheelbarrows.

TRANSPORT

The men and their families were kept away from the local communities partly by wish of the locals themselves and partly because many lines were built at some distance from established settlements because of the reluctance on the part of some landowners to sell their land to the railway companies or to have them passing near their properties.

At Godstone and at other wayside stations the platforms were laid out in a staggered pattern so that passengers had to cross the line behind the train by footpath. The buildings were prefabricated clapboard constructions with no canopies, so there was little protection for passengers. Indeed the whole ethos of the line was to meet the needs of the continental passenger and it seems that initially local services were slow to attract custom. The SER started with seven trains (four 'fast') a day to and from Folkestone plus a goods service. In 1844 James Batchelar of Lingfield, having made an arrangement with the SER, was advertising a twice weekly ('or oftener if required') goods delivery service from Godstone Station.

Increased traffic meant that the road north from Anglefield Corner to Godstone Station was upgraded and a new community grew up in what became South Godstone. The Lingfield communities now had a rudimentary rail service to London and the Kent coast. But it also signalled the end of through coach services to London. Also the opening of the Three Bridges/East Grinstead branch in 1855 further eroded the coaching business. Lingfield really had to wait until the 1880s before the full impact of the railway was felt.

The LBSCR opened the line from Brighton and Lewes to East Grinstead in 1882. This was extended to Oxted via Dormans and Lingfield in 1884. This followed pressure from the town's business community which was reaping the benefits from the connection with the main line via Three Bridges. At first the company operated four return weekday services to London and the coast, with two on Sunday and a weekday goods service.

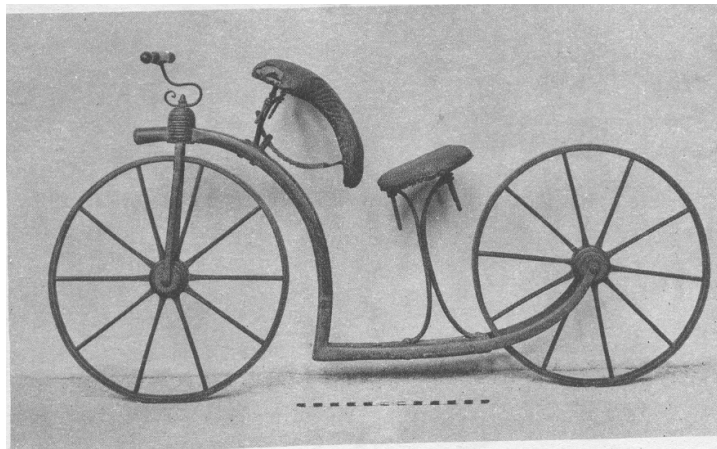
By the '80s the company had established its brand image and had made significant improvements in its operating practices and to its locomotives and rolling stock. Footplate men no longer had to drive in the open, as had stage coachmen, and carriages no longer looked like stagecoaches with railway wheels. Carriages had four or six wheels but the company was experimenting with bogie stock. Both Lingfield and Dormans stations were substantial buildings with accommodation for the station master. There were signal boxes at Dormans, at Lingfield plus an intermediate box used on race days, and at Crowhurst Junction serving the connection with the SER line. The goods yard was well able to handle building materials, to meet the burgeoning need for new houses in the area, as well as farm produce, general goods and of course household coal. The station was designed to cater for race course traffic both in respect of handling race specials and race horses which would be walked to the course by the new footpath, having arrived by horse box from far and wide.

By the turn of the century the LBSCR was operating 'business' services to and from London and a late night return on three nights a week. During summer months through trains ran to the coast. Clearly Lingfield was beginning to see the effects of

TRANSPORT

increased leisure for certain classes and the development of an embryonic commuting community. By 1900 the bicycle had come into its own as means of local transport. The practical bicycle with two wheels of equal size was only invented in 1885 but soon caught on as a useful means of travel and for leisure. It was adopted by the Post Office and by trades people for local deliveries. And stimulated the growth of cycling clubs which up to this point had had to contend with the unstable 'penny farthing'.

Finally mention should be made of the motor car. By 1900 its development was in its infancy. The vehicles that were on the roads were simply playthings of the well-to-do. As late as 1896 all mechanically propelled vehicles had to have a man walking in front waving a red flag so as not to frighten the horses or to run down unsuspecting pedestrians. In that year the first London to Brighton run took place following the passing of the Locomotives on the Highways Act. And then the race was well and truly on to develop the vehicle that was to have so significant an effect on transport in the twentieth century.



LADIES' HOBBY HORSE, 1819
(This machine weighed no less than 66lbs)