Walter Sir Gilbey

Early Carriages and Roads

Walter Sir Gilbey

Early Carriages and Roads

Published by Good Press, 2022

goodpress@okpublishing.info

EAN 4066338109392

Table of Contents

Cover
Titlepage
Text

Introduction.

Table of Contents

Only some three hundred and fifty years have elapsed since wheeled conveyances for passengers came into use in England; but, once introduced, they rapidly found favour with all classes of society, more especially in cities. The progress of road-making and that of light horse-breeding are so intimately connected with the development of carriages and coaches that it is difficult to dissociate the three. In the early days of wheeled traffic the roads of our country were utterly unworthy of the name, being, more particularly in wet weather, such quagmires that they were often impassable.

Over such roads the heavy carriages of our ancestors could only be drawn by teams of heavy and powerful horses, strength being far more necessary than speed; and for many generations the carriage or coach horse was none other than the Great or Shire Horse. Improved roads made rapid travel possible, and the increase of stage coaches created a demand for the lighter and more active harness horses, for production of which England became celebrated.

If comparatively little has been said concerning horses, it is because the writer has already dealt with that phase of the subject in previous works.[1]

[1] *The Great Horse, or War Horse; Horses, Past and Present.* By Sir Walter Gilbey, Bart. (Vinton and Co., Ltd.)

FIRST USE OF WHEELED VEHICLES.

Wheeled vehicles for the conveyance of passengers were first introduced into England in the year 1555. The ancient British war chariot was neither more nor less than a fighting engine, which was probably never used for peaceful travelling from place to place. Carts for the conveyance of agricultural produce were in use long before any wheeled vehicle was adapted for passengers. The ancient laws and institutes of Wales, codified by Howel Dda, who reigned from A.D. 942 to 948, describe the “qualities” of a three-year-old mare as “to draw a car uphill and downhill, and carry a burden, and to breed colts.” The earliest mention of carts in England that some considerable research has revealed is in the *Cartulary of Ramsay Abbey* (Rolls Series), which tells us that on certain manors in the time of Henry I. (1100-1135) there were, among other matters, “three carts, each for four oxen or three horses.”

BADNESS OF EARLY ROADS.

That carriages did not come into use at an earlier period than the sixteenth century is no doubt due to the nature of the cattle tracks and water-courses which did duty for roads in England. These were of such a nature that wheeled traffic was practically impossible for passengers, and was exceedingly difficult for carts and waggons carrying goods.

In old documents we find frequent mention of the impossibility of conveying heavy wares by road during the winter. For example, when Henry VIII. began to suppress the monasteries, in 1537, Richard Bellasis, entrusted with the task of dismantling Jervaulx Abbey, in Yorkshire, refers to the quantity of lead used for roofing purposes, which

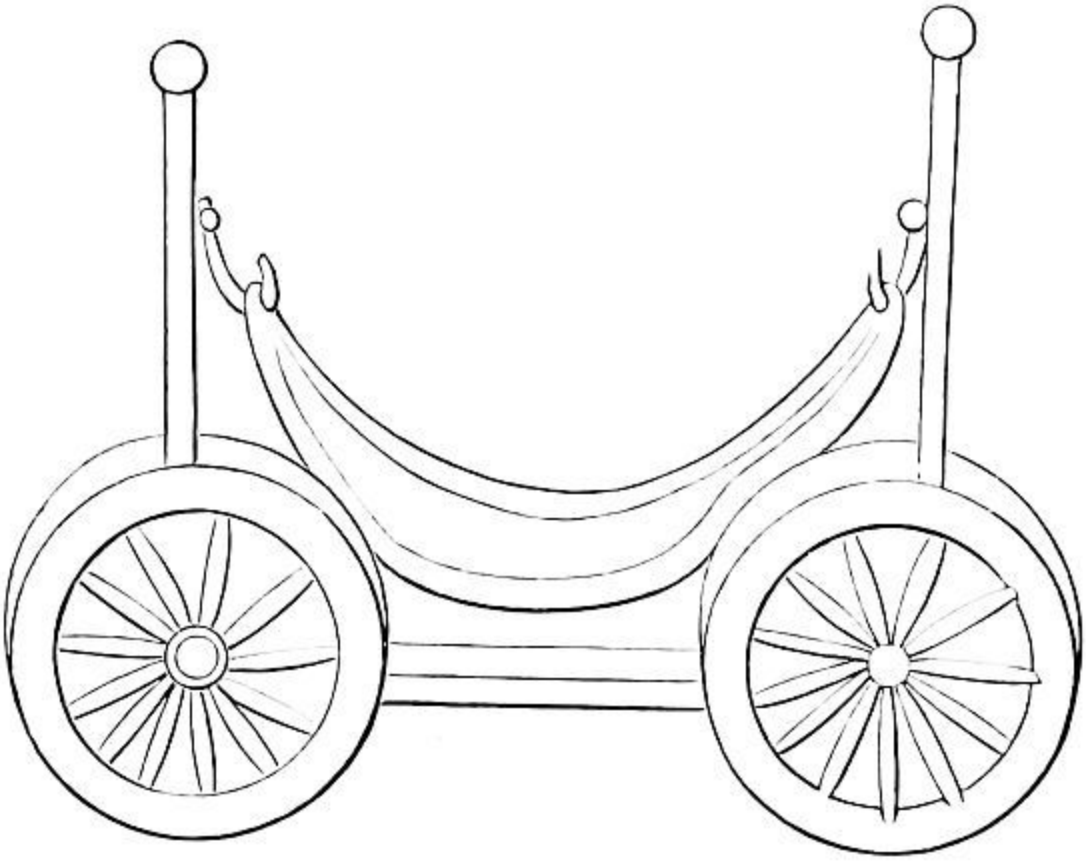
“cannot be conveyed away till next summer, for the ways in that countrie are so foule and deepe that no carriage (cart) can pass in winter.”

In the Eastern counties, and no doubt elsewhere in England, our ancestors used the water-courses and shallow stream beds as their roads. This is clear to anyone who is at pains to notice the lie and course of old bye-ways; and it is equally clear that a stream when low offered a much easier route to carts, laden or empty, than could be found elsewhere. The beds of the water courses as a general rule are fairly smooth, hard and gravelled, and invited the carter to follow them rather than to seek a way across the wastes. In process of use the banks and sides were cut down by the wheels or by the spade; and eventually the water was diverted into another channel and its old bed was converted into a road.

SAXON VEHICLES AND HORSE LITTERS.

Strutt states that the chariot of the Anglo-Saxons was used by distinguished persons for travel. If the illustrations from which he describes them give a fair idea of their proportions and general construction, they must have been singularly uncomfortable conveyances. The drawing is taken from an illuminated manuscript of the Book of Genesis in the Cotton Library (Claud. B. iv.), which Strutt refers to the ninth century, but which a later authority considers a production of the earlier part of the eleventh. The original drawing shows a figure in the hammock waggon, which figure represents Joseph on his way to meet Jacob on the latter’s arrival in Egypt; this figure has been erased in order

to give a clear view of the conveyance, which no doubt correctly represents a travelling carriage of the artist’s own time, viz., A.D. 1100-1200.



HAMMOCK WAGGON.

Supposed to have been in use in England about

A.D. 1100-1200.

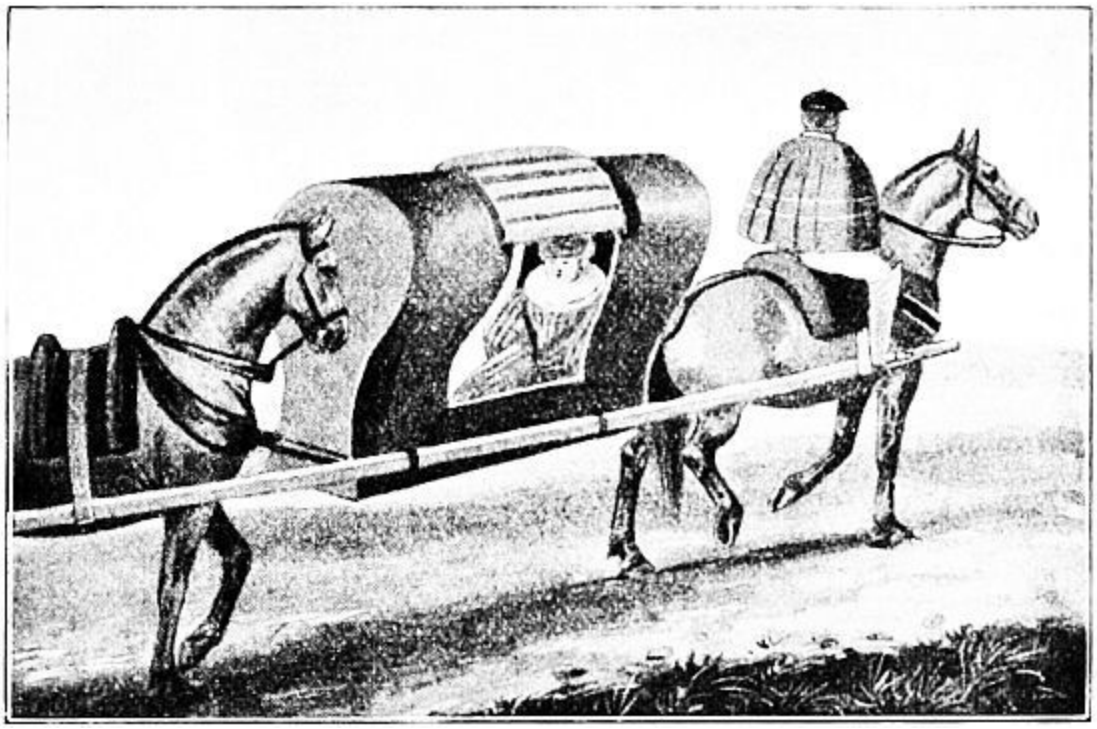
Horse litters, carried between two horses, one in front and one behind, were used in early times by ladies of rank, by sick persons, and also on occasion to carry the dead. Similar vehicles of a lighter description, carried by men, were also in use.

William of Malmesbury states that the body of William Rufus was brought from the spot where he was killed in the New Forest in a horse-litter (A.D. 1100). When King John fell

ill at Swineshead Abbey, in 1216, he was carried in a horse-litter to Newark, where he died. For a man who was in good health to travel in such a conveyance was considered unbecoming and effeminate. In recording the death, in 1254, of Earl Ferrers, from injuries received in an accident to his conveyance, Matthew Paris deems it necessary to explain that the Earl suffered from gout, which compelled him to use a litter when moving from place to place. The accident was caused by the carelessness of the driver of the horses, who upset the conveyance while crossing a bridge.

The illustration is copied from a drawing which occurs in a manuscript in the British Museum (Harl. 5256).

Froissart speaks of the English returning “in their charettes” from Scotland after Edward III.’s invasion of that country, about 1360; but there is little doubt that the vehicles referred to were merely the baggage carts which accompanied the army used by the footsore and fatigued soldiers.



HORSE LITTER USED A.D. 1400-1500.

The same chronicler refers to use of the “chare” or horse-litter in connection with Wat Tyler’s insurrection in the year 1380:—

> “The same day that these unhappy people of Kent were coming to London, there returned from Canterbury the King’s mother, Princess of Wales, coming from her pilgrimage. She was in great jeopardy to have been lost, for these people came to her chare and dealt rudely with her.”

As the chronicler states that the “good lady” came in one day from Canterbury to London, “for she never durst tarry by the way,” it is evident that the chare was a “horse-litter,” the distance exceeding sixty miles.

The introduction of side-saddles by Anne of Bohemia, Richard II.'s Queen, is said by Stow to have thrown such conveyances into disuse: "So was the riding in those whirlicotes and chariots forsaken except at coronations and such like spectacles:" but when the whirlicote or horse-litter was employed for ceremonial occasions it was a thing of great magnificence.

CONTINENTAL CARRIAGES IN THE 13TH AND 14TH CENTURIES.

Carriages were in use on the continent long before they were employed in England. In 1294, Philip the Fair of France issued an edict whose aim was the suppression of luxury; under this ordinance the wives of citizens were forbidden to use carriages, and the prohibition appears to have been rigorously enforced. They were used in Flanders during the first half of the fourteenth century; an ancient Flemish chronicle in the British Museum (Royal MSS. 16, F. III.) contains a picture of the flight of Ermengarde, wife of Salvard, Lord of Rouissillon.