

If tonight while sleeping , you were caught in a time warp and woke tomorrow morning in London, or any other English city, in the mid 1850s , your first conscious thoughts would probably be aroused by the sound of horses' hooves , horses pulling the carts of the nightmen and scavengers , the waggons of tradesmen and the market gardeners bringing produce into the markets and the carriages of early trawlers. The cities were alive with horses , the air heavy with stable smells and echoing with the clip-clop of hooves on cobbled stones.

Although the railways had come and railway mania had swept the country, with railway patterns in drapers shops and railway journals in the stationers and booksellers, the horse was still the king of local transport. Throughout the Victorian era the horse remained what the car, lorry and other motor transport are today , the means of carrying goods and people to the door of factory, shop, office and home . The trains brought the people of the 19th century to the cities' termini but they still had to travel to reach their destinations in places such as Islington, Fulham, Chelsea and Westminster and the only means to do this was on foot, or through the efforts of thousands of horses.

Earlier in the century numerous coaches were running on the London-Brighton road , the average time taken varying from five to seven hours. The Times coach, for instance, left Brighton at seven in the morning to arrive at Charing Cross just after mid-day , ready to leave again at two in the afternoon and be back in Brighton five and a half hours later. There was considerable rivalry between the coaches , although their times were sometimes affected by the thirstiness of the driver. Bob Pinter, for instance, the driver of the afternoon 'Quicksilver' coach , a fine man with horses, could be delayed if it were not ensured that all his stops for changes of horses were well away from public houses.

The Bull and Mouth, in St Martins le Grand, was a well known City house owned by Mr Edward Sherman who in the 1840s had about 400 horses working in his Mail coaches , which included the Wonder, travelling between London and Shrewsbury , and were all painted yellow. He also had horses under contract to the Post Office and it a curious twist of history that Post Office Headquarters now stand on the site of his stables.

The commemorative green buses which appeared on some London Transport routes a few years ago celebrated the 150th anniversary of pioneer

of the horse drawn omnibus, George Shillibeer, in days when driving furiously meant seven miles and hour. The idea of providing communal horse drawn transport (as against the privately owned or individually hired (hackney) carriages) for short journeys inside cities or towns was originated in Paris in 1819 by Monsieur Jacques Lafitte. One of the destinations of his first buses was apposite a shop owned by a man called Omnes, above which hung a sign 'Omnes Omnibus (all things for every body)'. Lafitte liked the idea and called his new public vehicle 'the Omnibus'.

George Shillibeer was a naval man who had left the sea to work as a coachbuilder in Paris, he produced an improved vehicle for Lafitte and decided that he would try to make his own fortune with public omnibuses in London. In July 1829 he put the first horse bus on the London roads, choosing a toll-free route between Paddington Green and the Bank, a popular destination for business men who had moved out to the suburbs north of Hyde Park but still worked in the city. Shillibeer's name was written in large letters on the side of the buses which soon became known as 'Shillibeers'.

The first carriages for public hire in London had been introduced centuries earlier in Stuart days and the term 'hackney carriage' originates from the licensing office which was situated in this part of London. The reputation of hackney drivers for rudeness and coarseness and charging exorbitant fares contributed to Shillibeer's early success with his comparatively luxurious vehicles and well-mannered drivers. His coaches ran four times a day, via Marylebone and Somers Town and City Road to the Bank, the fare for the whole journey being sixpence and his smart conductor in white trousers and a black jacket with brass buttons was said to have 'captivated the hearts of all the fair damsels of Paddington Green with his handsome figure and beautiful accent'.

At first some of Shillibeer's past ship mates were hired to man the other buses but some grew bored and were replaced by professional coachmen, but the strict standards of manners were still insisted upon and the passengers were also provided with books and magazines to read on the journey. Despite all these attractions the venture did not prosper long, the conductors pilfered the money and the passengers stole the books. Soon rival firms were springing up and eventually Shillibeer was forced off the road, although some of his competitors even had the audacity to put his name on their pirate vehicles, trading on his reputation for good service.

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As for Shillibeer, he had the good sense to get into a more flourishing trade, that of an undertaker and his hearses with ' Shillibeers Funeral Carriages ' on the side were soon a familiar sight in London.

Shillibeers buses had been drawn by three horses, one of his earliest rivals George Cloud started his business by running a service between Hammersmith and Hyde Park Corner to St Pauls, his vehicles were drawn by two horses, were smaller than Shillibeers and painted red. Hammersmith was a popular centre for the new bus companies probably through its convenient situation on the outskirts of London and the comparative ease of finding stabling space for a large number of horses. In the 1840s a Street Directory shows three proprietors there including one woman, Ann Mitchell.

Mayhew tells of various ways in which the omnibus proprietors attempted to check on the conductors, one being the employment of a respectable looking woman who could pose as a passenger and surreptitiously count the number of travellers to provide a tally against which the takings could be checked (there were no such things as bus tickets for many a year), but if she was rumbled she was more than likely to be dumped off in the most inconvenient and dirty place. The men, on the other hand, had to work long hours with no security, often being dismissed on the spot for no reason or a minor misdemeanour and there were always many others willing to take their place.

The bus driver had a far more secure position being a skilled man and Mayhew interviewed one who had done the job for fourteen years,

It was a hard life for man and beast he said he had only a few hours off every other Sunday and if he asked for more he would be told he could take a holiday if he liked ...for good! He was still sorrier for his horses. The starting and stopping was hardest for them he said, Its such a terrible strain, I've felt for them on a wet night with a bus full of big people '. This driver was particularly against the use of a bearing rein, the fashion for pulling up a horses head, feeling that if the animal could put his head down and pull, allowing his collar to take the weight, it would help him. On steep hills such as Ludgate and at Holborn, extra horses were sometimes kept to help get the load up the slope, but one of the tragic sights of London was that of a fallen horse, either sick or injured, lying dying in the gutter .

Buses had to run strictly to time, regardless of the traffic and weather with time keepers along the route. Horses were changed about five times a day, but galloping was forbidden even with a light load.

A strong horse was needed to withstand the hard work of pulling weights around three tons overall along cobbled or asphalt surface roads or even worse through the mud and slush of building sites on the outskirts of the city. A variety of horses was needed for the different types of work to which they were put, from small ponies and nags drawing the tradesmen's carts to the heavy dray horses needed for coal, beer barrels, refuse and builders' materials. These animals, weighing up to 15 cwt were bred on English farms and renowned for being able to withstand the strain on their tendons from the different surfaces on which they had to work as well as the way in which they could be trained to back obediently and skilfully.

The omnibus horse was usually a mare brought to London when she was about five years old she was paired with a suitable partner with whom she always worked and together they covered about 12 miles a day. The continued starting and stopping, as described by Mayhew's driver, was particularly hard on them and their working life was usually not more than five years. They were normally well fed, however, because an underfed horse could not do the work and Mayhew estimated that they ate about twenty pounds of hay and six pounds of oats a day. Using statistics supplied by the Royal Veterinary College he also deduced that this, with the addition of the water they drank produced no less than 36 pounds of manure.

Fashions in horse colours were subject to whims although grey horses were not popular in carriages because their loose hairs blew back on to the dark clothes of the passengers, but they were in demand for weddings and at one time much favoured by the fire brigades. Although horses could be fed at the agreed stopping points where hay and oats were kept, water was a much greater problem, water supplies were poor enough for human beings let alone animals and they often had to rely on the humanity of local shop or pub keepers for a bucket to drink from. It was to be some years before at the end of the decade, a group of horse lovers formed the Metropolitan Drinking Fountain and Trough Association. The human end of the enterprise, to place drinking fountains in streets and open spaces, was in the cause of temperance as much as hygiene (other water often being polluted to give a good excuse for the consumption of beer and spirits!) By 1861 over sixty fountains and troughs had been provided and it was estimated that over 50 000 horses drank daily from the troughs at the turn of the century. Eventually, in the 1950s with the almost complete disappearance of the horse from city streets many of the trough

free to anyone who was willing to remove them and pay the cost of transport but as they were made of solid granite and weighed about four tons most applicants were discouraged and many that remained were planted with flowers.

Having analysed the fuel consumption of the horse and the inevitable waste matter from its 'combustion' Henry Mayhew has left a detailed account of the men and some women who made the streets even moderately passable for those who had to travel on foot, the crossing sweepers without whom the roadways would have been a morass of horse dung. The occupation, he said, had three advantages, the smallness of the capital required (about twopence for a broom), the opportunity and excuse it offered for soliciting gratuities without being considered a beggar and for those who had established themselves, a certain status in the neighbourhood and the chance to receive weekly offerings from the residents. The right to a 'pitch' was protected at least unofficially by the local police 'I believe there is only one crossing in London which is in the gift of a household' said Mayhew 'and this proprietorship originated in a tradesman having had a paved footway laid down at his own expense in front of his shop so that customers might run less chance of dirtying their boots when they crossed over to give their orders. Some bakers, however, keep a crossing sweeper not only to keep a clean path for their clients but to open and shut the doors of their carriages.'

Most of the crossing sweepers, he said, were disabled or infirm in some way but considered even the scanty subsistence they made preferable to the workhouse. The chief afflictions were old age, asthma and rheumatism or the loss of limbs. In addition to the regular sweepers, stationed at the corners of streets or squares, there were casuals who went about the streets sweeping before the passers-by. The regular sweepers' 'perks' also included being on hand to perform any odd jobs for nearby households such as posting letters or running errands as well as having access to the crumbs from the rich men's tables either waste food or old clothes.

Girl sweepers usually only took to the job when it was wet, spending the rest of their time selling lace or singing in the streets, Mayhew estimated the earnings of the sweepers, whom he considered to be among the most honest of the London poor (because their trade demanded the respect of the neighbourhood) to be little more than twelve or fifteen shillings a week. As to the numbers, he could only estimate that it was very large. 'There are few squares without a couple of these pathway scavengers

and in the more respectable squares such as Cavendish Square or Portman Square every corner has been seized upon and in the principal thoroughfares nearly every street has its crossing attendant. Some such as Billy, in Cavendish Square, were as well up in society gossip as any scandal sheet. Among the women sweepers was a sweeper's wife of eighty 'almost beyond labour' and another who worked near the Foundling Hospital, whose head under its pinched up bonnet was always bandaged because of a gathering on it.

Among the casual sweepers were those who only did the job on Sundays mostly outside churches and chapels. The child sweepers often formed themselves into gangs under a 'captain' and in the evenings went off 'tumbling' in the West End where they turned cartwheels or performed other acrobatics in front of the theatre goers to beg for money, particularly when the gentlemen were in the company of the ladies of the town. All the children were filthy, ill-clad and without shoes, their hair matted like old paint brushes and their skin grey with dirt, most were orphans and lived in lodging houses, sleeping three or four to a bed.

With the condition of the streets, aggravated by herds of cattle being driven through them to Smithfield or other markets, it is not surprising that anyone who could afford it preferred to be drawn by horses than to walk about in their refuse. The hackney coach drivers and cabmen, unlike the buses, were only allowed to ply for hire when on the move, fares were fixed, the drivers hired their vehicles and horses from a cab proprietor, and it was a rare one that rose to the position of owning his own and some had a bad name, 'loose fellows of the fancy man class', 'ayhew was told, the better sort being those who lived near the cab yards. The worst were known as bucks, unlicensed drivers who often had no home and would sleep in the cab at night. They usually acted as stand ins for the regular drivers on the late shifts. In the 1850s there were reckoned to be 5,000 cabmen in London. Imitation may have been flattery but for Shillibeer it had spelled disaster as everyone got in on the act. The rivalry reached a fever pitch with the influx of visitors to the Great Exhibition in 1851 when rival conductors are said to have frequently left their buses to fight one another and breakneck speeds terrorised the London streets as 'pirate' buses raced to get to the stops where passengers were waiting. Fares went up and passengers were carried on the roof, which at that time was illegal.

Matters reached a head in 1855 with another move from France this time by a company of which five of the directors were French, *resulting* in the irate bus proprietors and their employees protesting loudly against the foreign invaders with placards and slogans such as 'Keep the Frenchies Out,' but when assured that their only intentions were to bring some order out of the chaos of London's transport and that jobs would not be lost, the take-over proceeded quite smoothly and by April 1856 the 'Illustrated London News' was able to report that the Compagnie Generale des Omnibuses de Londres, now the General Omnibus Company, employed 1300 men and 5000 horses. In the 'Gazette's' area they bought up about forty buses and a competition to produce a new omnibus design with a prize of £100 was won by a Hammersmith man, R. F. Miller, who is believed to have been Robert Miller, a carriagemaker of King Street. His design consisted of a larger compartment for passengers, so that they did not have to crouch, better ventilation and other improvements and this design became the basis for the standard 'knife board' pattern which lasted for many years. The knife board had top deck seats placed back to back and it was accepted that only male passengers would use these until much later in the century, skirt boards were placed along the outer edges to hide the ladies' legs from the eyes of passers-by in the street below.

The standards of service were also improved according to the 'Illustrated London News' so that the 'unprotected female need no longer be a strong minded individual to travel by bus and even anxious parents will henceforth hazard their daughters without disagreeable associations connected with chimney sweeps or dealers in Norfolk sausages!'

An intimate picture of what it was like to travel on one of these vehicles is given by the painting by W. M. Egley in the Tate Gallery, 'Life in a London Omnibus' in which business men in stovepipe hats are crammed into the tiny cabin with a mother and her children and women with laden baskets of shopping or work to be delivered.

A brief rival to the horse-drawn omnibus was the alarming steam propelled carriage which a Cornishman Goldsworth Gurney had introduced two years earlier and reached 15 miles an hour on the road between London and Bath. A few years later, Walter Hancock had brought a similar vehicle to cover the distance between Paddington and the City and other entrepreneurs followed suit. In Epping in 1836 the entry of such a vehicle into the town caused such a commotion that it was greeted by cheering crowds but the enterprise did not last and it was seven decades or more before mechanical transport really began to offer

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serious competition to the horse , especially as it was restricted to 4 miles an hour preceded by a man with a red flag , the ruling also applied to the first motor cars.

Steam packets on the river were also providing a new form of transport in the 1850s but these were not reliable in bad weather and liable to accidents, many of the craft being hardly river worthy and there were reports of drownings and at least one explosion.

The possibility of being run over by a horse-drawn fire engine, as the fastest vehicle on the mid-Victorian roads was a dramatic hazard of street life, and another drama was provided by the runaway horse. The 'Gazette' reported that ' a large strong horse ' had taken fright at Shepherds Bush and 'rushed at full gallop by the deep hollow ground in the centre of the highway at Richmond Road Villas. In that hollow a number of children almost constantly play and ^{we} have repeatedly warned the owners of the ground that it has to be filled up. On this occasion happily no accident occurred. '

The only other method of transport, other than on foot, was the velocipede which consisted of no more than two wheels connected by a bar to which was fixed a saddle, the rider propelling himself along by giant strides. A Gazette advertisement offers one of these for £ 2. 2s, with another 'to take two people ' (obviously the first velocipede made for two.) This can be compared with a quiet pony of 15 hands, 'with chaise harness and every requisite' for £ 15 which is advertised in the same issue.

In 'Sketches by Boz ' Dickens described the ' early clerks ' who walked from the suburbs on the outskirts into the City every morning. At least those coming from the north and places such as Islington or Camden Town did not have to pay a toll as many of those coming from south of the river had to cross bridges such as Southwark, which levied a toll for pedestrians up to 1856, but entrepreneur landlords in the suburbs also got in on the act when they found these commuters using short cuts to cross the remaining fields and charged then a halfpenny at the gates.

' Men of Middlesex unite ! Let every town village, parish and hamlet form a committee to petition against these injurious obstructions '. The 'Gazette' published this battlecry in July 1855 in support of a campaign to abolish the turnpikes at Notting Hill, Kensington, Hammersmith , Shepherds Bush and Brompton , ~~In the same issue a reader~~

In the same issue a reader sheltering under the pseudonym of ' J.G.' protests ' I regard the keeper of the turnpike gates as ^alegalised highwayman . How often have I seen these gates shut against the traffic of the labourious and honest dealers , droves of cattle intercepted and lines of vehicles delayed until it suited the tollkeeper to let them pass. The extension of London is looking to the west but its more rapid progress is impeded by these tolls. '

It is unlikely that had the tolls been abolished later London's extension to the west would have been impeded for long, nothing could stop that great outpouring of people and their works, but they had enjoyed a long history. From medieval times the lords of the manors who were responsible for the upkeep of the roads on their estates had been allowed from time to time to levy tolls, or pavage , towards their repair, Tolls called ' pontage ' were also allowed to repair bridges and one of these was granted in 1350 for the bridge over the Countess or Counters Creek which became the Kensington Canal and later a railway, the bridge that now carries the old A 4 main road past Olympia.

In 1726 a Kensington Turnpike Trust was set up by an Act of Parliament to appoint 148 trustees with power to establish turnpikes and exact tolls in an attempt to improve some of the roads leading in and out of the west of London , the state of which has become appalling as the traffic on them increased. Apart from various property owners and other well known residents they included Sir Robert Walpole who was then First Lord of the Treasury and Sir Robert Eyre, the Lord Chief Justice . Similar trusts were set up all over the country.

It was obvious from the beginning that however great their number the trustees knew nothing about the making of roads and if they knew how to make money, they had little chance of enforcing it without a police force, as a road user who objected to tolls (as nearly all of them did) could rely on fisticuffs and fast legs to evade them. In 1733 the driver of a Windsor coach was prosecuted for 'violently assaulting the collector and dragging him down whereby he lost the toll money and the use of two of his fingers '.

Two years later the same collector petitioned the Board of Trustees to say that he had not complained before although suffering crushings and fractures but now having been run over by a dray and coach which

had impaired his health , broken his constitution and run him into debt, and asked for relief. The Board gave him four guineas ' Sometimes such disputes resulted in real tragedy as in 1783 when Lord Clanricarde 's servant killed Thomas Cooper for disputing the toll at the turnpike on the road from Counters Creek to Brentford.'

How little the tolls went towards improving the roads is proved by records which state that in 1889 Hammersmith Road, at the present junction with Hammersmith Broadway, was almost impassable and 'there is not a way to church that is fit to tread '.

At first, three toll gates had been set up by the Kensington Turnpike Trust, one at Hyde Park Corner , obviously the most profitable as it stood at one of the busiest entrances and outlets of London, and another at what is now Buckingham Gate and Buckingham Palace Road. The third was near the Queens Elm in Fulham Road where there were actually two gates, one to control the traffic going east and west along Fulham Road and another on Hogmire Lane leading to Kensington (the present Gloucester Road).

Cunning travellers avoided the latter by going a long way round via Church Lane so a toll was set up there, Tollhouses to shelter the keepers in bad weather were built beside the gates and a supply of coals and candles provided in the winter. In 1729 the Trustees decided that they also needed a gate in Pimlico near the entrance to the Kings Private Road (now Kings Road, Chelsea) and others on Kensington Gore and Kensington Road, the latter being moved some years later to Earls Court Lane which was said to have been for many years ' foundrous and not passable with carriages ' but was now considered improved enough to be regarded as a public highway.

One of the problems at the Kensington Gate , and others like it on the outskirts of London , was the expense and inconvenience to farmers who used to bring their cattle in from the outlying country to graze on the fields around Knightsbridge before being taken on to Smithfield for sale and slaughter in the morning. This meant the payment of two tolls unless they drove their herd north by the Uxbridge Road to pay only one toll at Tyburn near Marble Arch.

The innkeepers and the owners of the grazing fields at Knightsbridge supported the farmers protest against this imposition with the result that special ' season tickets ' were supplied which allowed the drover to pass free until noon on the following day.

Some agricultural transport was exempt from toll and a ' Gazette report tells how Henry Woodwell, a toll collector at Notting Hill turnpike was summoned for charging a threepenny toll on a cart laden with earth and manure. Mr J. Burden of West Mall, Kensington, told the court that he was carting fat black soil consisting of earth and manure to Shepherds Bush to improve his land and the defendant demanded a toll. Other cart loads of his manure had passed through the gate toll free with no objections being made by other collectors. This was the first attempt made to charge him. The toll keeper said he had read an opinion by a barrister, Mr Jonas Levy, that such soil was not exempt as it was not for agricultural purposes but on questioning revealed that the opinion had not actually been that of the barrister himself but of his uncle, so the court ruled in favour of Mr Burden and ordered that his threepence should be repaid to him and the toll keeper pay the costs of the case, which was two shillings.

A great deal of trouble was taken at the tollhouses to decide when the hour of midnight came and the next day's tolls were due. At Hyde Park Corner there was a special dial which was kept in order by a watchmaker at a fee of two guineas a year in 1781. The toll keeper would set an hour glass by the dial at 11 p.m and send to Pimlico where at exactly midnight a bell would be rung.

The Kensington Turnpike Trust had appointed twelve men as toll collector working on alternative 24 hour shifts and being paid ten shillings a week. They had to be able to read and write and were not allowed to sell ale or beer or 'strong waters' at the toll gates. Each was given ' a little black paper book ' for his accounts. No one was liable for a toll more than once a day and the amounts varied from fourpence for a coach, berlin, chariot, chaise or carriage drawn by six or more horses to one halfpenny for a horse, mule or ass, laden or unladen but not drawing a cart. Drovers of cattle were charged at fivepence a score and sheep, lambs, calves or hogs at twopence a score. (Imagine counting them!)

The rather unenviable task of being a Turnpike Trustee was alleviated somewhat by the fact that the meetings were usually held in a tavern or coffee house. These included the George in Kensington Square and the Kings Arms at Fulham as well as the Feathers Tavern in Sloane Street and the Cadogan Arms in Chelsea. On October 1757 one of their Minutes records ' resolved that for the future no business be done at the meeting of the Trust after dinner. '

Cart

The turnpikes were notorious for their crooked dealings and had frequently been attacked by William Cobbett in his 'Rural Rides' collectors were often found guilty of fraud and although dishonesty was slightly curbed by severe penalties, rudeness was common and a collector at Kensington was dismissed for 'very impertinent behaviour towards the Prince of Wales'.

The Broad Wheels Act of 1755 had attempted to exempt from toll any vehicle with wheels over nine inches thick because it was thought that these would be less damaging to the road surfaces but this was changed again to charging a lower toll. Likewise another act instituted a weighing system but this was defeated by the necessity of installing weighing engines and cranes. From this it can be deduced that the turnpike trusts were always short of money, desperate to raise more and usually had to be subsidised by the local vestries.

It had become obvious by the 1850s that the toll gates had long outlived their usefulness, They had already been abolished in central London and as Charles Strutt wrote in his campaigning editorial in 1855 'the towns of Notting Hill, Kensington, Hammersmith, Shepherds Bush and Brompton are growing in importance by their population and extension of new building and increasing trade to be considered a continuation of the streets of London'. Chelsea had been released from the infliction of the turnpike, he said, so why not these adjoining places? Turnpike gates would not be tolerated in the Strand, Oxford Street or Piccadilly. Tolls were an impediment to intercourse between the parties at either side of the gate and opposed to the principle of free trade. It interfered with the letting and sale of property. He had known families dispense with their own horse and vehicles in consequence of the annoyance and expense, diminishing employment. He had also noticed when passing St James Square, Notting Hill, a few mornings ago that a whole range of houses on the south of the square was unoccupied, a fact he blamed on the toll gate and appealed to the landlord of that property to 'join our Householders Club against them'.

His views were well supported by his readers. Asking where he could sign the petition a Mr Robin Bird said he knew of a highly respected family which had left Notting Hill owing to the expense of the turnpike, and Mr Oliver Smart of Shepherds Bush told how he had driven his four wheeled cart with his wife and child to Church Street to buy a cup for his little boy. 'I bought one for a shilling but it cost me

' I had to pay 4½d to the turnpike at Shepherds Bush and 4½d at Church Street . Have we no way of getting rid of this barbarous nuisance except by Act of Parliament. ? ' And Henry Stephenson, of Upper Church Street, Chelsea said he had turned round when almost in reach of the Crystal Palace at Sydenham rather than have to pay a toll.

Possibly because its problems were so complex and also through the influence of those in power who did not fancy having to tackle them, London was excluded from the Municipal Corporations Act of 1835 which laid down some standards in the conditions of roads and street lighting , Kensington, however, had obtained a local act, the Kensington Improvement Act in 1851 which empowered the Vestry to carry out various repairs and innovations and the ' Gazette's ' editorials in the years 1854/55 indicate that the Editor and some of his readers were not at all satisfied with the progress being made.

One of the main centres of complaint was Holland Walk which in those days was one of the few routes connecting what the ' Gazette ' called ' the twin towns ' of Kensington and Notting Hill . Holland Walk said the paper, supported by numerous correspondents, was ' wholly without the light of gas and appropriated to the nightly assignations of the designing and abandoned . By such inattention to lighting and by allowing these paths to become a rendezvous to the obscene, a great wrong is done to the nervous and prudent members of our community, These walks are pleasant agreeable and convenient by day and there is no reason why they should cease to be at night , unilluminated by gas and unprotected by police . A few lamps with one or two policemen would render the thoroughfare passable at all times.' (It is a sobering thought that 130 years later, despite a number of lamps and the regular presence of the law, Holland Walk is still not to be recommended to the nervous or prudent after the hours of darkness)

In 1855, however, Charles Strutt thought he had the remedy, he recommended those who suffered this inconvenience to enquire at the Vestry Hall between 10 a.m and 4 p.m. as the oracles there might shed some light on the question.

Addison Road, said one of his correspondents, was also so dark and ill-lit that to find one's way it was advisable to keep to the right hand side and guide oneself by the stars, keeping Ursa Major a little to the east of the chimney pots on the eastern side.

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An editorial also appealed to the clergy in the vicinity (although not saying what they could do about it) as the question was one of morals , the writer having frequently witnessed in the dark spots of Lord Holland's park assemblages of boys and girls seen standing near women of the town lurking for their victims, ' But enough of this filthy subject ' he concludes ' God said " Let there be light " ' .

The opulence of the new houses which had recently been built in Addison Road during the past twenty years were contributing greatly to the parochial rates, he said, and therefore deserved better service. One or two of the lamps flaring away unnecessarily outside the entrance of the Vestry Hall might well be spared for the purpose of lighting this thoroughfare , especially as every little court and alley in the old town with its dazzling palaces selling gin was lavishly illumined. Palace Gardens (today's Kensington Palace Gardens or ' Millionaires Row ') also had many street lamps , he said, although the gates were closed to the public at midnight.

The absence of street lamps, was not the only complaint, others considering the supply of gas to be so inadequate as to make those that were there, ineffective ' little melancholy dots of glimmering light which have made the oil lamp contractors blush ...' the charge of five guineas a lamp should be sufficient to ensure a better light if the instructions had not been issued to the lamplighters to turn them down.

Bad lighting added to the hazards of the building sites which abounded in the rapidly developing neighbourhood .The south side of Vincent Terrace ' a row is skeleton houses ' (financial crises often caused projects to be abandoned for months, if not years) to the west of Archer Street (now Westbourne Grove) was said to be in a very dangerous condition. ' The area of each house is open without a protecting wall and about the centre a deep trench runs halfway into the road.' A passer-by not minding his way or walking in the dark would be in imminent danger of breaking a limb or being killed, says the Gazette's vigilant ' Inspector ' in his ' Notebook.' " Few buildings in Portland Road were also described as providing dangerous traps for horses and passengers and should be levelled as they were unsafe and unsightly and last winter two people ^{had} fallen into the area of a skeleton house there. Charles Strutt said he had spoken to the contractor of an area of new houses opposite the market at Shepherds Bush and he had admitted the danger but had promised no remedy, ' We must call on the police to take notice of this dangerous man trap ' says the militant

Editor.

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What action the police might have taken is not clear but the Vestry was very unlikely to be moved by such protests said an embittered 'Constant Reader'. 'Had the agitation been in favour of some additional gold lace to the garments of our beadle or for the purchase of a peacock to strut ornamentally in the courtyard of the Vestry Hall no doubt a Board Extraordinary would have been called. The parish has long been unprofitably encumbered with a millstone sort of Board of Do Nothings around its neck. Hopefully the new Act (the Metropolitan Management Act 1855) will infuse some vitality , a new set of men capable of feeling the impact of the duties they undertake. '.

One solution to the problem of night travel through dangerous and unlit lanes and highways lingered on from the previous century when travellers would assemble together to make the journey after hospitality at Holland House back to London , a gun being let off to mark the hour of departure. This practice still endured, much to the annoyance of a ' Gazette ' reader who wrote on December 8 1855 that he retired to bed every night a little after ten o ' clock ' but no sooner am I fairly asleep than 'Bang ! ' goes Lord Holland's gun at eleven waking me from my slumber which is some time ere I regain. This is a nightly annoyance , not only to myself but to many of my neighbours , who have frequently complained of the circumstances. If his Lordships field piece must be discharged every night to frighten enemies might he not allow it to be fired earlier in the evening and not startle the surrounding residents who keep good hours making them feel as if they were before Sebastopol. ! ' .

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Paxton's Great Victorian Way was probably the most exciting of many extravagant proposals to transform London and solve its terrible traffic problems in the decade after the Great Exhibition . It was one of two schemes both obviously inspired by Paxton's Crystal Palace as the rival designer, William Moseley, submitted a plan for a Crystal Way which was to run from Cheapside to Oxford Circus , with a branch from Piccadilly to Seven Dials, with a road and shopping arcade , 25 feet above street level , running over a railway. Its incredible impracticality got it very little way with the Select Committee on Metropolitan Communications as Moseley seemed unable to explain how his trains would run, or stop at the stations. Paxton's scheme was no less ambitious but he had his reputation behind him .

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His route, over ten miles long and 73 feet wide, included shops and houses inside a covered way, the atmosphere would be as pure as the country, he said, and the temperature controlled, to give London a new source of comfort and enjoyment and prevent infirm persons from having to go abroad for their health in the winter. Charles Strutt obviously favoured Faxton's scheme, (especially as the section across Kensington Gardens would be open to people of the right social position and horse riders only) and gave it some detailed coverage.

The main feature of Sir Joseph's scheme is the construction of what he calls a boulevard or girdle to commence near the Royal Exchange at the back of Moorgate Street, cross Cheapside by Old Jewry, avoiding as much ~~the~~ as possible the thoroughfares and valuable property at present existing. Proceeding across Cannon Street and over the river by Southwark Bridge, through the Borough, through Lambeth, across the the South Western Railway, then across the river again by the Houses of Parliament near Victoria Street, thence through Brompton passing by Gore House and thence crossing Kensington Gardens to the Great Western Railway Station diverging a little in order to take the general traffic of Marylebone, continuing about half way between Regents Park and Oxford Street, again diverging to the North Western Station thence to the Great Northern Station (Kings Cross and St. Pancras) and round by Islington to the same point it started from.

The Gazette editorial concluded ' Sir Joseph Paxton has minutely entered into the cost, repair sources of profit and general public advantage and the urgent consideration of the government should be given to this plan to relieve the swelling tide of traffic . If it materialises the genius who gave us the Crystal Palace will have given our huge city a glittering avenue rendering it, in the magnificence of its chief thoroughfare without approach paralleled in ancient or modern times.'

Fanny Kemble enjoyed her ride which she said was a sensation of flying and 'quite delightful, as smooth as possible.' A very different view was expressed by George Osbaldstun, the famous 19th century sportsman and gambler, in his autobiography when he described a rail journey much later in the century in the 1860s as one in which there was constant fear of accidents with women screaming every time the unlit train passed through the stygian darkness of the tunnels.

In 'Dombey and Son' Dickens' description of the railway mania which had hit the country was that 'even the houses seemed disposed to pack up and take trips' and describes a railway station and its sidings. 'All night and day the conquering engines rumbled at their distant work, or advancing smoothly to their journeys and gliding like tame dragons into the allotted corners grooved out to the inch for their reception, stood bubbling and trembling, making the walls quake as if they were dilating with the secret knowledge of great powers yet unsuspected in them.' Dickens was to be involved in a horrible railway accident nearly twenty years later when travelling from Folkestone to London on the way back from a visit to Paris. The train in which they were passengers crashed through a bridge over a river between Headcorn and Staplehurst in Kent and an engraving in a contemporary magazine showed him tending the injured and dying (he himself was unhurt).

Although trains were running into the centre of London and all round the outskirts, the more central suburbs were not served with rail transport until comparatively late in the Victoria era. In Strutt's day the only railway actually in his circulation area was the Birmingham Bristol and Thames Junction line which in 1836 had been authorised to run from the basin of the Kensington Canal, south of what is now Olympia Station, to connect with the main lines to Birmingham and Bristol at Wormwood Scrubs. The line opened for passengers in 1844 with stations at Kensington and Shepherds Bush. It was not a success and was nicknamed 'Punch's railway' from the frequent unflattering mentions it received in that journal, and the passenger service ceased after only a few months although it continued to transport freight. A serious collision occurred on a level crossing at Wormwood Scrubs in 1855 where it met the GWR, and a bridge was built five years later by which time the railway had also been extended south following the now drained canal channel and crossing the river at Battersea to reach Clapham Junction. From then on, for over a century, this ancient line had a chequered career, mostly unsuccessful

At last however it may be coming into its own with the announcement of plans to restore it into a loop line service which would provide the much needed interconnection between all the main rail termini in London , an extension of its original purpose so long ago.

The first Reading Station consisted of little more than a few wooden huts in which passengers could buy tickets and wait for the trains , a dozen or so of which ran each day , but by June 1841 when the Great Western Line had been extended to Bristol more platforms were built, numbering seven by 1844. In the meantime the railway had received the royal accolade with the Queen taking a train from Slough (the nearest station to Windsor Castle) to London on June 13 1842 . It was the first time that a reigning monarch has ridden on a train and she considered the speed far too fast (it was 44 mph) in future royal trains gave up showing off and travelled at a more sedate pace. Works began on the large permanent station at Reading in 1850 and were completed in 1854

The postscript to the Gazette's transport story must be this item which could hardly be of more topical interest and appeared no less than 131 years ago.

' For several weeks past some able hydrographers and engineers have been employed in surveying the coasts of the neighbourhoods of Boulogne and Calais on the French side and of Dover and the South Foreland on the English side of the Channel and taking some soundings with a view to reporting on the feasibility and advantage of forming a communication between the two countries by means of a submarine tunnel and railway.....

In another part of London and less fanciful was a scheme by W.H. Twentymen, which envisaged a Royal Champs Elysees from Regent's Park to Hampstead with an Arc de Triomphe en route and a pagoda on Primrose Hill.

That the Victorians still thought of the means of transport in horsey terms, despite the coming of the train, is shown by the diary of the actress, Fanny Kemble, when she described a journey she was invited to take on the footplate of an engine travelling from Liverpool to Manchester in 1830 in which she was escorted by George Stephenson himself.

We were introduced to the little engine .. she goes on wheels which ~~are her feet~~ and are moved by bright steel legs called pistons, the reins bit and bridle of this wonderful beast is a small handle, the coals which are ~~its cats~~ were under the bench. This snorting little animal, which I felt rather inclined to pat, was then harnessed to our carriage.

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