

THE WHEELS AND THE WATER

The story of Lymm's journey through the Transport Revolution



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Repairs Neatly and Quickly Executed.

Even the introduction of the motor-car did not lead immediately to the disappearance of the horse as a mode of transport. In fact the very first car in Lymm in 1900 was often towed home by a horse after an adventurous excursion. And the two new bay geldings that arrived in 1912 were equipped by local tradesmen: Mr Druce the saddler and harness maker of Bridgewater Street (today the site of Saddlers bar) and Mr Clarke the wheelwright and blacksmith of Heatley, who provided two carts. A horse and cart was still the favoured mode of transport for many local tradesmen too, well into the 1920s. Motor transport was still considered to be unreliable, especially in cold weather.

Fred Ingham (left) ran a butcher's shop in Heatley. The shop was handily placed opposite The Green Dragon and there was a handbell just inside the shop that could be heard in the pub just in case Fred was off the premises .

After a busy day delivering to the surrounding areas like High Legh Fred could safely take a well earned nap and rely on the horse to get them both home, anticipating the "self-drive" car by a hundred years!

The picture is taken outside The Spread Eagle Hotel —notice the advertisement for petrol. Change is coming. On the right is Charles Heaven who ran the Railway Hotel.



Canals pose very different maintenance problems to roads and railways. The wear and tear on the banks is less visible but when they fail the consequences can be catastrophic. The Bridgewater Canal has always been at greater risk in this regard, as large sections of it are built on artificial embankments to avoid the need for locks. In 1829 the Manchester Advertiser reported a breach at “Bolling Bank” near Lymm when the canal burst its banks on both sides:

“In consequence the district around has been drenched with water and great damage sustained by the occupiers of the land.”

Incredibly the paper reported that, while many boats had been left high and dry and that “stops” had not been closed in good time, it was nevertheless expected

A breach near to what was then the Boathouse pub at Agden Bridge. Frantic work is going on to create a temporary dam .



Another breach—near the old coal wharf—now the site of Lymm Cruising Club, and a chance for a adventure.

that the canal would re-open in eight to ten days. Over the years there have been many such breaches. In 1931 there was a break in the canal bank where the coal yard used to be situated near to the Whitbarrow Aqueduct. The spot can still be recognised by the concrete buttress which was erected to reinforce the canal wall .



THE REMARKABLE AFFAIR OF “THE LYMM MYSTERY”

The Duke of Bridgewater’s Canal has claimed more than its share of victims in its 250 year history. Many men died in its construction and there have been countless drownings, mostly accidental, but some in more suspicious circumstances. However, there can have been few incidents more dramatic and inexplicable than what became known in the press as “The Lymm Mystery”.

It was a cold winter’s day early in January 1875. One of the newly delivered steam tugs which had just begun work on the Bridgewater was making its way through the village. Suddenly to the rear the boatman saw, momentarily, a body rise to the surface and then disappear.

Quickly he moored up and ran back to the spot but could see nothing. The police were called and the canal was dragged. Eventually the body of a young woman was recovered. She was badly cut and scarred with one prominent long clean cut below one ear. She was naked apart from her boots and stockings and one kid glove. The corpse was carried to The Plough Hotel (now the Lymm) where it was laid out for a post mortem and, it was assumed, for identification.

It was concluded that the body had not been long in the water and an appeal went out for news of anyone matching the girl’s description who might have gone missing. But the young woman’s identity remained a mystery and, given her state of undress, foul play was strongly sus-

pected. However it was difficult to decide whether some of the injuries could have been caused by the body making contact with the screw propellers of boats. When no-one came forward after two weeks, the authorities reluctantly decided that a funeral should be arranged for her in Lymm at St Mary’s Church. A large crowd of

“A woman entered the churchyard and demanded to see the corpse”

local people gathered for the ceremony as the story had gripped the village. What happened next is probably best described by the news report at the time:



“Just as the funeral bell tolled a woman entered the churchyard. She demanded to see the corpse and in response to her earnest entreaties the lid was taken off

the coffin when she identified the deceased as her daughter ... a sad scene then took place and when all doubt was removed the interment of Mary Rigby aged 20 of Liverpool proceeded.”

Within days a man was arrested: Watson Whiteley, a chimney sweep of Tuebrook, Liverpool. All seemed set for a swift conclusion to the affair. Mary, who was in service in Liverpool, had been having an affair with a young man who was a sweep, and another woman, Catherine Lawless testified how she delivered Mary’s notes to the sweep’s house. She identified Whiteley in court as that man.

But by June not only had Whiteley been cleared of the charges, but he in turn prosecuted the police for wrongful arrest and Catherine Lawless was brought to court on a charge of perjury. Whiteley had an alibi and claimed mistaken identity. He maintained that he had had a young apprentice living with him named “Joe” and that the letters were intended for him. He had returned them requesting that they stop. The case against the police was dismissed on a technicality. Young Catherine Lawless was cleared of perjury in a bitter trial that ended in a violent confrontation between Lawless and Whiteley on the steps of the court. Counter accusations flew back and forth but the mystery of why Mary was in Lymm that day, of whether she was murdered and by whom has remained to this day unsolved.



ABOVE: Lymm Station 1910. A very rare picture of the early days of the railway in Lymm, - originally provided by Walter Struthers to co-author Alan Taylor. The crowds are on the westbound platform in their Sunday best. Are they heading home after a trip to Lymm for some special occasion.? May Queen perhaps? Far left is a poster for Hilton's Boots—a well known shop on Bridgewater Street.

RIGHT: Excursions were running even in 1865—no luggage allowed. That would have taken up valuable human cargo space. The advertisement also proudly proclaims that third class will be a covered carriage.

LONDON AND NORTH-WESTERN AND MANCHESTER SOUTH JUNCTION & ALTRINCHAM RAILWAY &c.—CHEAP TRIP TO LYMM, &c.—On Saturday, July 1, 1865, and every Saturday until further notice, a SPECIAL TRAIN will leave the Oxford-road Station, MANCHESTER, at 2 10 p.m., for DUNHAM-MASSEY, HEATLEY, LYMM, THELWALL, and LATCHFORD. Returning from Latchford at 8 30 p.m.; Thelwall, 8 35 p.m.; Lymm, 8 40 p.m.; Heatley, 8 45 p.m.; and Dunham-Massey, 8 50 p.m.

FARES THERE AND BACK:—

To Dunham Massey, Heatley, or Lymm....	2s. 0d.	1s. 0d.
To Thelwall or Latchford.....	2s. 3d.	1s. 3d.

Children, full fare. No luggage allowed.—By order.
Lime-street Station, Liverpool, June, 1865.

Early rail fares were higher than a stage coach on the basis that trains were quicker and more comfortable. However by the time Lymm station opened in 1853 there was a realisation that railways were for everyone albeit the masses would be huddled into very basic third class accommodation, even open to the elements at first. One hard-headed businessman summed up the case for passenger traffic like this:

“Third class passengers at fifteen to the ton yield fifteen pence

per ton for haulage only as they load and discharge themselves”.

However primitive the carriages may have been, they came to Lymm in their thousands. At holiday times in particular the village could be crowded with visitors. They came to the Warburton Regatta on August Bank Holiday in the 1870s, to the Rushbearing and to the May Queen Festival at Whitsun. For all these events special trains were laid on from Manchester. The council even requested that the platforms at Lymm and Heatley be lengthened as the excursion trains from Manchester often had to pull in twice to disgorge

Ships Across the Fields

THE MANCHESTER SHIP CANAL

A WITTY LETTER TO A LIVERPOOL NEWSPAPER IN 1825 suggested that the corporation should send a representative to a dinner of the Manchester Canal shareholders in 1825 and, when they were in good humour having eaten and drunk well, to read them a poem which started:

*Oh ye Lords of the loom
Pray avert our sad doom
We humbly beseech on our knees
We do not complain
That you drink your champagne
But leave us our port if you please.*

The letter was a reference to the Corporation's anxiety about a proposal that had gone before Parliament in the previous year to construct a canal from the Dee Estuary through Frodsham, Lymm and Didsbury into Manchester - effectively by-passing Liverpool.

In the end the bill was vigorously opposed by any number of interested parties and thrown out. The burghers of Liverpool breathed a huge sigh of relief; for another two generations anyway.

*An increasingly rare sight since the 1960s. A ship across the fields—
This picture was taken from Ridgeway-Grundy Park across the rooftops
of Statham Close and was one of the Manchester Liners fleet.*



As early as 1914 the government had considered the idea of motorways - or at least *“dedicated routes for motor traffic”* as they called them - and in 1924 a private member’s Motorways Bill proposing the construction of major toll roads went before parliament. In 1937 a deputation *“in size and representative character almost without parallel in the history of international relations”* paid a visit to Hitler’s Reich to view the new autobahn network. Almost immediately plans were drawn up for England’s first toll motorway between London and Birmingham, but war broke out and it was another twenty years before work would start.

By 1957, with the post-war boom in car ownership, several major roads were at full capacity. Traffic volumes were increasing exponentially and in just a couple more years even the AA patrolman on his

motorcycle would finally be relieved of the duty to salute every approaching member on the highway. One of the major headaches was the route north over the Ship Canal at Warrington. It was gaining a national reputation as a traffic bottleneck. So when the first stretch of the M6 from Stafford to Preston was given the go-ahead in 1958, it was not surprising that the section that would bypass Warrington was made a top priority.

And so work commenced on what was originally called the Thelwall Bridge but is now universally known as the Thelwall Viaduct. Incidentally the bridge is actually in Lymm but was given its name as it crosses an area called Thelwall Eyes.

By 1935 Lymm was well capable of drumming up an impressive traffic jam like this one at Lymm carnival procession celebrating George V’s Silver Jubilee. In the car—provided by the Boumphreys, is Wilhelmina Edwards —“Cotton Queen” for the day.





"Delving into Transport History"

*Above is the competition winning photograph by
Estelle Cadwallader.*



The Wheels And The Water is the story of a village that was in at the start of the Transport Revolution. It tells how transport shaped Lymm and the lives of the people who made it their home.

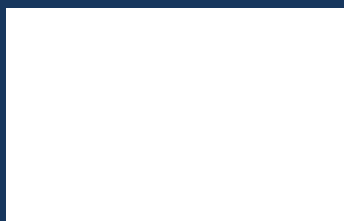
In 1777 the Duke of Bridgewater's Canal carved a route through the village. With its arrival the Transport Revolution had begun.

It was followed by the turnpike, the railway, the Manchester Ship Canal and finally, with the rise of the car, the motorway and Thelwall Viaduct.

Read about the great schemes that never came to fruition such as Lymm's electric light railway, and of murder and mayhem and the tragic tales of those who lost their lives in the construction projects. There are stories too of amazing forgotten events like the Warburton Regatta.

Most of all, *The Wheels And The Water* shows a village adapting and evolving as each new transport wave rolls in.

Finally the book remembers a day in June 2013 when the village celebrated its heritage with the first Historic Transport Day that brought craft and vehicles of every description, as well as many thousands of visitors, pouring into Lymm.



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