

250 years of Transport in Kingsbridge – from Tally Ho to Tally Ho!

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250 YEARS OF TRANSPORT IN KINGSBRIDGE

The most obvious feature of transport around Kingsbridge over 250 years is the slow pace of change - the lack of improvements to roads by Turnpike Trusts until 50 years after other areas; the lateness of the coming of stage coaches to the area; and the delayed arrival of the railway until 1893. This can be partly explained by the relative isolation of Kingsbridge but more significantly by the dominance throughout this period of the Kingsbridge estuary which has always had a spirit of its own. The estuary was not as we see it today but a bustling port with a large transshipment of goods together with many shipbuilding yards along its banks.



ETCHING OF KINGSBRIDGE FROM THE ESTUARY DATED 1818

Road

Up to the early 19th century roads around Kingsbridge were so narrow, miry and dangerous and the hinterland so hilly that the town looked to the sea and coastal shipping as the best means of carrying goods and passengers to the outside world. Although a rough lane wound round the muddy creeks the most direct route was by water.

From early times woollen goods, cider, grain malt and slates were shipped away and coal, fish, limestone, probably from the quarries at Plymstock, for lime burning and fertiliser, mortar and limewash and white Beer stone from East Devon for building brought in.

The lanes, deepened between their high banks by the trampling hooves of generations of cattle droves and strings of pack-horses and donkeys – the chief means of land freight, except for ox-drawn sleds and rare farm carts – were almost impassable by the late 18th century. The narrow steep lanes were difficult even for pack horses, donkeys and oxen to negotiate. Carts and wagons were not commonly used until the late 18th century.



A TYPICAL SOUTH DEVON FARM CART



A SOUTH DEVON FARM CART



A TYPICAL DEVON FARM CART WORKING IN A RICK YARD

The South Devon style of farm wagon was very light and manoeuvrable with small front wheels which could pivot under the bed of the wagon to cope with the steep hills, narrow lanes and difficult field gates.

Despite the state of the roads there has been a great deal of pedestrian traffic throughout the centuries on Devon's roads. William Cookworthy walked from Kingsbridge to London to seek his fortune. Until recently people thought nothing of walking 10 or even 20 miles to visit friends or relations; or to walk to work; to market; or to school and especially to a wreck. Packhorse and smugglers lanes remain as Green Lanes of which there are over 700 in the South Hams alone.

For over 30 years from 1810 Sally Stone was post-woman and postmistress at Salcombe and at first she walked daily to Kingsbridge along the creek to fetch the mail brought in by coach, returning at night with her heavy bag filled with items she was commissioned to buy for which she charged a penny an item as well as the letters. She eventually earned enough to buy a small sailing boat that enabled her to take passengers as well.

Stage coach was the only means of early travel over long distances but these were infrequent, slow, uncomfortable and expensive. They were the prey of highwaymen and in bad weather passengers invariably had to get out and push. Coaches travelled about 25 miles a day so Exeter to London took about 8 days. Coaching Inns sprang up along the main routes where travellers could eat and rest and the horses changed (200 horses would be used to pull a coach between London and Exeter. Fares were expensive, at a time when labourers earned 50p a week a ticket to London from Exeter would cost over £200 though admittedly it was cheaper to ride on the roof subjected to all the elements.

To digress: an unusual event occurred in August 1787 when a visit was made by John Adams and his wife Abigail to Kingsbridge. He was to become the first vice-president of the United States in 1789 and the second president in 1796. He was the first American Minister to the Court of St James and the townsfolk of Kingsbridge thought him worth a peal of bells. Their link to Kingsbridge was through Abigail's brother-in-law Richard Cranch who was born in Kingsbridge in 1726 and left with his sister for Massachusetts in 1746. The Adams agreed to visit Richard's close family and friends during their month long tour of the West of England which was very much in the manner of tourists (albeit with their very own coach and four). They were very complimentary of Kingsbridge and the people they met describing them "*as more like our New England people than any others I have met in this country before*".

Perhaps not so surprising given the origins of many in the colony. However it makes the point that despite the poor condition of the roads it was still possible to travel extensively throughout the South of England and the West County.

The improvements to the roads by the Turnpike Trusts and better designed coaches allowed the journey time between Exeter and London to be reduced dramatically. Contemporaneous accounts describe the quickest journey time in 1816 of 20 hours by 'Quicksilver', said to be the fastest stage in England. By 1836 the quickest journey time was 16 hours but slower coaches took 30 hours travelling overnight and licensed to carry 6 inside and 14 outside the fare being less, 25 shillings outside, 35 shillings inside, compared to £3 10s for the faster mail coaches built for 4 passengers inside and 4 out with the roof reserved for large mail bags.

The coach for Plymouth would leave Exeter at six in the morning; stop at Chudleigh for the passengers to breakfast, when a cock fight would be witnessed; then onto Totnes for dinner and another cock fight; then start for Plymouth arriving there about six in the evening.

However although the coaching era was generally short-lived with the growth of the railways in the 1840's, it survived much longer around Kingsbridge than in many places elsewhere not only with the late coming of the railway but also because Kingsbridge was an ideal centre for small family run local coach services based at the town's inns.



WAYBILL FOR ROBERT FOALE'S 'TELEGRAPH' IN 1824

The first stage coach service, with Plymouth, was started by Robert Foale, the proprietor of the Kings Arms Hotel in 1824 - a twice weekly service with his coach the 'Telegraph' that went well until the coming of the South Devon railway in 1848. This put the fast coaches from Exeter to Plymouth out of business and one driver, John Tucker, came to Kingsbridge looking for a new route. He started in opposition with a coach called 'Mazeppa' and immediately fierce rivalry ensued, even to drive each other off the road, to get to Plymouth first, a thrilling and hair-raising experience which ultimately ended in a serious crash that led to 40 years of collaboration and partnership..

In 1836 the Plymouth to Kingsbridge stage coach was operated by Mr R Foale from Kingsbridge and Messrs W Rowe and Company from Plymouth. Each of them operated a single journey Monday to Saturday. Mr Foale's licence was number 5637 and his coach could carry four passengers inside and eleven outside. Rowe's vehicle was licence number 5663 and could carry four inside and eight outside.

In June 1837 a coach named the 'Telegraph' ran from Mr William Rowe's Kings Arms Hotel, Bretonside, Plymouth, through Modbury, and Aveton Gifford to Kingsbridge every Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday at 10am.

Although stagecoaches were licensed to limit the number of passengers to be safely carried, on one later occasion a coach named 'Great Britain' driven by Robert Foale's nephew, Joe, who had been a driver of the 'Quicksilver' mail coach and was known as 'Whip of the West', with a capacity for ten people inside and 24 outside carried 51 people. Accidents were common on the hilly roads not least because the coaches had no brakes. Joe Tucker later made the Journey to Plymouth in 3 hours instead of the usual 4 hours.

Robert Foale also establishes a coach service from the Kings Arms Kingsbridge the ten miles to Kingsbridge Road Station near Wrangaton after the South Devon Railway line opened in 1848 and it operated until 1892. By 1880 36 coaches a week were covering this route meeting trains and carrying passengers fare (1/-) parcels and newspapers. Both services started from the coach office here in the Kings Arms Hotel.



**THE COACHING OFFICE OF FOALE'S AT THE KINGS ARMS HOTEL ABOUT 1880
WITH PASSENGERS LUGGAGE WAITING ON THE PAVEMENT**



The King's Arms, at the top of Fore Street, was opened in 1775. From 1824 the stage coaches to and from Wrangaton and Plymouth ran from here.



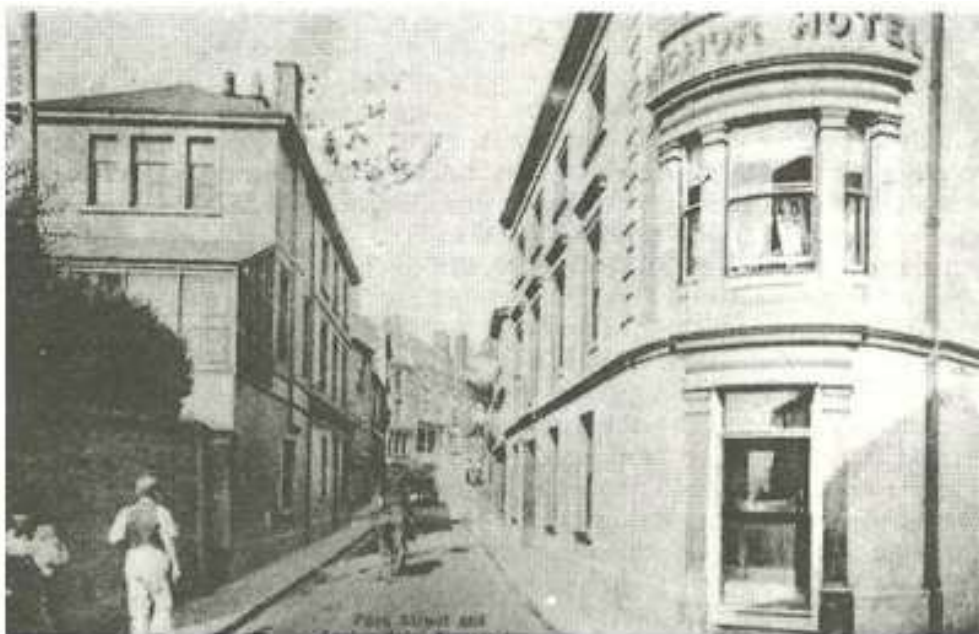
THE KINGS ARMS HOTEL FORE STREET

The Kings Arms Hotel has had a complicated history. A small part was once a Church House which belonged to the Kingsbridge Feoffees. In the 18th century it was a shop and became the Kings Arms in 1775. Two years later a ballroom was built by public subscription for race balls and assemblies until 1809 when a new ball room was built on land acquired to the north and the old room converted to bedrooms. Following its success as a coaching inn from 1824, Robert Foale bought the adjoining property to the south and probably rebuilt the façade with bay windows. In 1875 the building was further enlarged by the purchase of the adjoining shop (now NATWEST Bank) with two bay windows and a separate hotel entrance from the coach office.

Robert Foale also ran a coach twice a week from the Kings Arms Hotel to Dartmouth from 1856 when the turnpike to Dartmouth was completed and daily after 1864 when the railway was brought to Kingswear.

However the driving force behind the Dartmouth service was William Vickery who came to Devon in 1872, married John Tucker's sister and became proprietor of the Torcross Hotel. This took advantage of the change of horses here and the addition of a fourth horse to help pull the coach up the hill at Strete Gate as well as providing refreshments for the passengers.

By 1880 there were 18 coaches a week between Kingsbridge and Dartmouth and in 1888 William Vickery took over the Anchor Hotel in Kingsbridge and ran coaches from there twice daily to Dartmouth, the journey taking 3 hours 'with brakes fitted to all carriages and foot warmers sent if required'. In 1893 the single fare was 3 shillings. Surprisingly 56 lb of luggage was allowed per person and coaches awaited not only the arrival of trains in Dartmouth via the ferry but also steamboats from Totnes.



THE ANCHOR HOTEL KINGSBRIDGE

The Anchor Hotel at the foot of Fore Street, previously called the Blue Anchor, was the second largest hotel in the town, had its own brewery and extensive stabling (on the site of Oke's Garage), a coach house and large yard.

With failing health William Vickery founded the 'Dartmouth Coaching Company' which was a great success carrying 13,644 passengers in 1892. This route was one of the last horse drawn local services in Devon and only stopped in 1916 during the First World War when the coachman, Lewis Guest, was called up for war service (see below).

In addition, the surrounding villages were visited regularly by carriers who took parcels and passengers to and from the town as well as the shopkeepers delivery vans such as Donovans, the longest established business in Kingsbridge with four generations of Donovans trading first in Church Street and then from 1893 in Fore Street (see below).



THE DARTMOUTH COACH NEARING KINGSBRIDGE ALONG THE UNMADE EMBANKMENT ROAD CIRCA 1912



DONOVAN'S DELIVERY VAN IN CHURCH STREET – THE LONGEST ESTABLISHED FAMILY BUSINESS IN KINGSBRIDGE FROM 1878

Pigot's Directory of Devonshire in 1830 lists

CARRIERS

FROM DODBROOKE

To DARTMOUTH, Richard Foale, every Wednesday and Friday – and Henry Branscombe every Saturday

To EXETER, John Foales and William Lidstone every Monday and Wednesday.

To PLYMOUTH, Joseph Foales from Dodbrooke, and Thomas Haynes from Duck Street every Monday and Thursday.

William White's History Gazetteer and Directory of Devonshire 1850 lists

COACHES from the Kings Arms to Plymouth daily

CARRIERS Ford and Gillard to Dartmouth, Mon, Tu. And Thur, and Fri;

Henry Luscombe and S Sawyer to Plymouth, Mon and Thur; and Luscombe and Lawrie to Totnes, M., W., F. and Sat.

Stage coach travel was full of incident but none more so than the Journey from Kingsbridge to Kingsbridge Road station on the 8th/9th March 1891 during what was dubbed The Great Snowstorm. The road to Kingsbridge Road Station was blocked by 12 foot drifts and coaches could not run for 17 days.

THE GREAT SNOWSTORM

The Exeter Flying Post carried a report concerning travellers whose coach driver refused to go any further on the Monday and who then walked 2 miles to the California Inn, where they spent the night. It continues "On Tuesday morning, after having a good breakfast the party made their way to Kingsbridge-road Station for the purpose of telegraphing their wives. The journey was fraught with perils and hardships. The roads were simply impassable, and a bee line had to be struck across the fields, deep snow drifts and snow covered hedges proving constant sources of danger. The rate of travelling was about a mile per hour, and hard work at that. Finding that telegraphing at Kingsbridge-road Station was impossible a fresh start was made, this time for Ivybridge, and here again the party had to make their way as best they could over the fields, the roads being completely blocked and full of dangerous drifts. "We were Englishmen" said Mr. Smith, "and were determined come what would, to get home and see our wives. Every now and again when one of the gentlemen advanced a step he would disappear up to his neck and have to be helped out by the combined efforts of his companions. After a little experience of this sort, all three decided that wriggling along on their stomachs, Indian fashion, was, despite the disagreeable results, the better means of making headway, and accordingly this method was unanimously adopted. On their arrival at Ivybridge the faces of the travellers were covered with frozen snow two inches thick, whilst their clothes were in a similar state, and the state of their linen necessitated a complete change".

The road from Kingsbridge to Sorley was blocked by 12 foot drifts and the coaches to Kingsbridge Road Station could not run for 17 days.

In the 18th century the poor state of the roads had always made travel inland slow and difficult and people relied on foot or horse for moving about. It wasn't until the advent of the Turnpike Trusts that coach travel had become a viable alternative to journeys by sea.



MAP OF DEVON TURNPIKES IN THE 19TH CENTURY

Some old roads had to be completely rerouted for the much larger heavier coaches that allowed fast coach travel between Kingsbridge and Plymouth and Kingsbridge and Dartmouth.

However turnpikes not only came relatively late to Devon, typical of counties distant from London having reached Exeter in 1753, but it was another 70 years before a Turnpike Trust was formed in the southern South Hams. The Kingsbridge and Dartmouth Turnpike Trust was only created by Act of Parliament in 1824 to link with other established turnpikes at Modbury, Totnes and Dartmouth to connect with Plymouth and Exeter. Further Acts of Parliament followed in 1828 and 1834. By 1840 the Clerk to the Trust Thomas Harris reported to the Select Committee on State of Roads 1840 "that there are 56 miles of road through 21 parishes all repaired by the trustees with 19 toll gates and 8 side gates. The roads are stated to be in 'tolerable repair'". By 1866 there were 34 toll gates and bridges on the Modbury-Kingsbridge-Dartmouth turnpike and by 1873 the total length of the Trust's roads was estimated at 64 miles.

The Trusts charged tolls to pay for the roads and their upkeep, collected at gates set across the road. It was common practice for Trustees to let out the toll-houses and the collection of tolls in return for a payment but when this could not be let at what was considered a fair price the Trustees kept the tolls in hand.

In Kingsbridge there were three gates, at the bottom of West Alvington Hill; at Belle Cross; and at the top of Fore Street – all now demolished along with the toll-houses at Sorley Cross, Kingsbridge Quay, Bowcombe and Malborough.

A “turnpike house” is recorded in the 1881 census close to Knowle Terrace at the junction of Fore Street with Plymouth Road. By then the Kingsbridge and Dartmouth Trust, which disbanded in 1882, had stopped using it to collect tolls. It is believed that the two gate posts from the Toll Gate can still be seen in the driveway of the nearby house’s known as Manor Cottage.



TOLL GATE AT TOP OF FORE STREET KINGSBRIDGE DISMANTLED IN 1884



BELLE CROSS KINGSBRIDGE TOLL HOUSE

The Belle Cross toll-house was on the main road from Totnes where at the foot of Belle Hill the road converges with Fosse Road, Church Street and Belle Cross Road. It is likely to have been demolished when the junction was widened but was still in evidence in 1933. The tall two storey toll-house had a traditional angled front and gothic windows. In 1871 it was occupied by mariner Benjamin Screech and his family with no indication that tolls were still being collected here.

The site of the West Alvington toll-house is now the roundabout with Cookworthy Road/Ilbert Road with the toll-house long demolished. There was a need to collect

tolls along the road to Salcombe and in 1871 the toll-house was known locally as “Tacket Wood Gate” and occupied by a solitary toll collector 54 year old Harriet Randall.

The Sorley Cross toll-house once stood where the road to Loddiswell meets the A381 from Totnes.

The exact whereabouts of the Kingsbridge Quay toll-house remains a mystery, but the 1841 census return records a ‘toll gate keeper’ William Hillman was living at the Embankment Gate House with his wife and daughter.

The Bowcombe toll-gate was at the north western end of New Bridge spanning Bowcombe Creek and the toll-house was built on the bend at the junction with the minor road to Bowcombe. In 1871 the "toll collector" was 65 year old Sarah Pilditch.

Perhaps the most interesting of all was Malborough Gate toll-gate where the A381 turns sharp eastward. Here several minor roads converge allowing the toll-keeper to catch travellers along the old roads from Salcombe to the south and the villages of Galmpton and South Milton to the north. "Townsend Cross" is still known as the "Turnpike" and there is a lane to the right called "The Dodge" as it enabled travellers to avoid the toll collector.

Further afield toll-houses can still be seen on the road to Modbury, at Ermington and at Yealmbridge on the road to Plymouth.

Estuary and Sea

In the absence of any decent roads the Kingsbridge estuary assumed great importance as a trade route and in the latter part of the 18 century, was thronged with ships of all types and sizes waiting to discharge their cargoes of cocoa, coffee, tobacco, sugar, spices, ginger, timber, cotton, grain, wines, rubber, silk and, less exotically coal and even guano; in fact, the manifest of cargoes is almost limitless.

Raw materials and manufactured goods could not be transported far by road but from Kingsbridge nearly all goods could be moved by sea. Local products such as barley and wool and high-quality cider from South Hams apple orchards were exported from Kingsbridge. Piracy and privateering were constant threats along the coast, which in turn gave way to organised smuggling. This was finally brought under control by efficient coastguards in the late 1800's.

Shipbuilding had always taken place on suitable beaches between Kingsbridge and Salcombe, and estuary shipbuilders had supplied 16 warships to join the fleet to counter the Armada in 1588 but now formal shipyards were being constructed and the 19th century was the heyday for shipbuilding on the Kingsbridge estuary with over 250 ships built between 1800 and 1880. The citrus fruit trade of oranges and lemons with the Azores and pineapples from the Bahamas, West Indies over twice as long a voyage led to the building

of about 120 topsail schooners, fast easily maintained vessels, mainly at Date's Boatyard (see left).

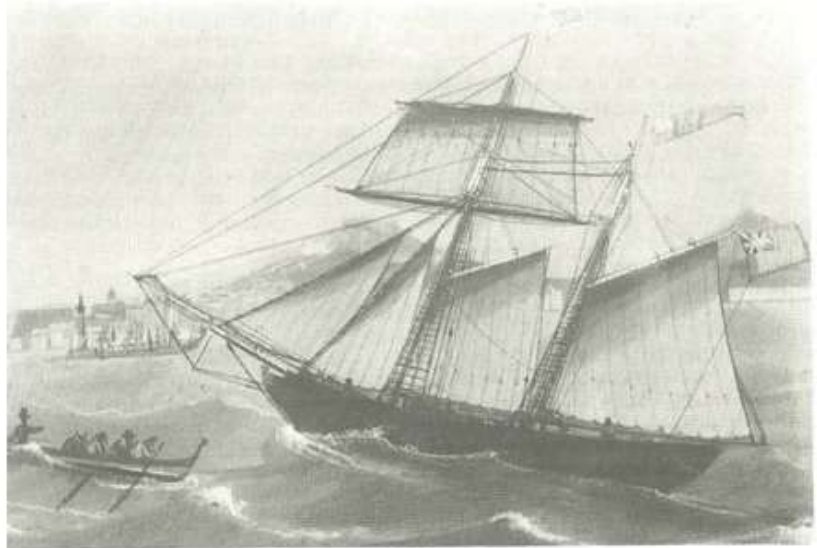


DATES'S BOATYARD SEEN HERE WITH KETCH 'PROGRESS' OF 84 TONS BUILT AT THE YARD IN 1884

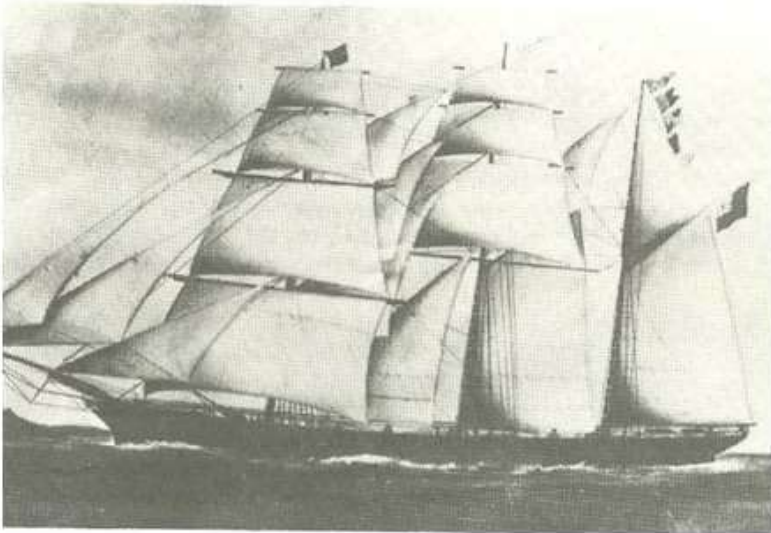
This is now the site of the modern development beyond the Crabshell Inn but where at least 85 vessels - schooners and the later designs of brigs, brigantines, barques and barquentines of up to 500 tons were built between 1837 and 1912.

Vessels were usually jointly owned by a consortium of local shareholders.

This early design of topsail schooner shows the classic features of a schooner, with two masts each in two parts, a long lower mast and a short separate topmast. The main canvas is set from the second or main mast and each lower mast has a gaff or boom sail. The quadrilateral or 'square' topsail makes her a topsail schooner and there are 2 staysails forward.



TOPSAIL SCHOONER 'PHOENIX', 103 TONS, BUILT AT SALCOMBE IN 1835



A three-master with, unlike a schooner, the foremast square-rigged.

BARQUE-SCHOONER 'NELLIE', 281 TONS, BUILT AT KINGSBRIDGE IN 1867



**SCHOONER 'LIZZIE', 111 TONS, BUILT BY DATE'S YARD IN 1872
LOST OFF TEIGNMOUTH 12TH FEBRUARY 1909**

However this lucrative fruit trade came at a heavy price. The fruit clippers were built for speed and as such were vulnerable with a crew of only 5 or 6 men to save weight. Nevertheless it is a shocking statistic that half the fleet, often with all hands, was sunk, wrecked or lost. Captains who prospered and survived the hazards and punishing ordeal often retired to build substantial houses for themselves but the prosperity was short-lived. Trade declined during the 1870's and outbreaks of orange and pineapple diseases in the 1880's sealed their fate and the trade and the ships had virtually vanished by the end of the century.

The evocative names of the clippers such as 'Arcturus', 'Argosy', 'Endymion', 'Pilgrim', 'Golden Fleece' and local village names like 'Alvington', 'Churchstow', 'Malborough', and rivers 'Avon' and 'Erme', the 'Queen of the South', and 'Queen of the West', 'Island Maid' and 'Ocean Belle' were either broken up or sold and consigned to history.

In the 1850's Date's Yard was Kingsbridge's biggest employer of over 40 men, shipwrights, carpenters, blacksmiths, rope maker's riggers, sail makers as well as the products of the Lidstone Foundry. But as the demand for new ocean-going sailing vessels rapidly declined these trades as well as the sailors themselves were forced to find new work or new skills. Dates Yard had turned to building trawlers and fishing craft but closed in 1912 by which time other methods of transport were well-established. The railway had come to Kingsbridge in 1893 and the first motor car appeared in 1898.

The estuary also supported many coastal vessels as shown in:-

Pigot's Directory of Devonshire in 1830

CONVEYANCES BY WATER

COASTING VEHICLES

To LONDON, THE Fame, Henry Langworthy, master;

the Pyramus, John Brian, master;

the George, Thomas Pullenden, master;

the Lord Nelson, Stephen Catt, master;

the Brothers, J Gest, master;

the Charles, Richard Lamble, master;

the Albion, John Bowden, master;

the Lark, Wm Collings, master

and the Commerce, - Thomas, master

- One of the above vessels sails every week for Carpenter Smith's wharf – Mr Wm Weymouth, agent Fore Street

- Boats to Salcombe every tide

A New Quay, also known as Bond's Quay and the Crabshell Inn Quay, was built by William Bond to accommodate vessels taking advantage of the deep water channel close to the eastern bank as the head of the estuary silted up.



NEW QUAY CIRCA 1875 ALSO KNOWN AS BOND'S QUAY AFTER ITS OWNERS



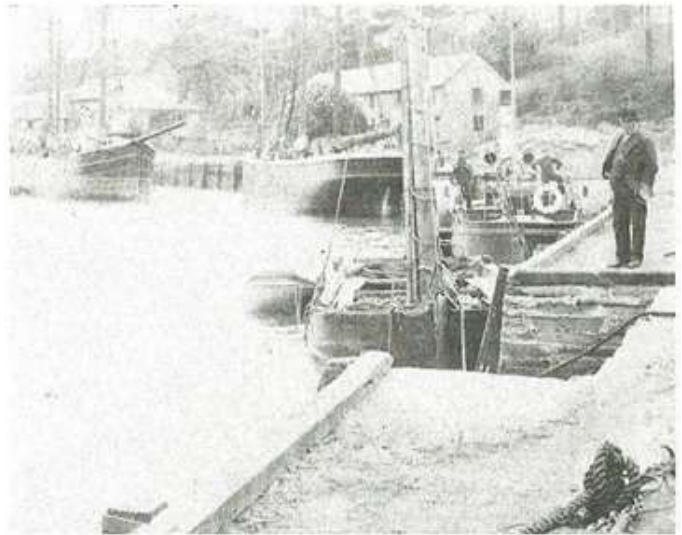
A BARQUETINE BEING TOWED BY STEAM LAUNCH AT BOND'S QUAY C 1895



THE CRABSHHELL INN AT BOND'S QUAY FORMERLY NEW QUAY INN SET UP BY THE BOND FAMILY IN 1840'S WITH SAILING BOAT BERTIE



NEW QUAY CIRCA 1910



WILLIAM BOND ON BOND'S QUAY ABOUT 1910

Prior to the building of New Quay vessels came right up to Dodbrooke Quay at the head of the estuary or Salt Mill Quay, near the current recreation ground.



**THE QUAY KINGSBRIDGE ALWAYS THE CENTRE OF THE TRANSPORT SYSTEM
WATER ROAD RAIL – NOW BUS STATION
QUAY GARAGE AND THE ANCHOR HOTEL**



DODBROOKE QUAY CIRCA 1890

William Bond was an 'Ale and Porter Merchant' who first developed the old Dodbrooke Quay to assist in landing his supplies of Allsopp's celebrated Pale and Burton Ale, Guinness and Stout destined for well over 20 taverns in the town. This included the New Quay Inn established by the Bond family in the 1840's to quench seamen's thirsts.

Sail had given way to steam and during the late 19th and early 20th centuries paddle steamers made daily trips between Kingsbridge and Salcombe firstly as goods carriers but soon they were also used for pleasure excursions in the estuary.

Larger steam packets made the journey to Plymouth several times a week until well into the 20th century transporting goods and people for shopping trips as an alternative to the crowded coaches at a single fare of 1/6d.

The first significant event in the improvement of the region's transport was the launch on 28th April 1857 of the 'Kingsbridge Packet', a 69 ton wooden paddle steamer built locally at Dodbrooke in the yard of William Date. Owned and operated by Hurrell Anthony Beer and Co, she ran twice a week between Kingsbridge, Salcombe, and Sutton Harbour Plymouth carrying goods. Goods ordered by Kingsbridge shopkeepers and tradesmen from wholesalers in London, Bristol or Liverpool as well as sugar, coffee, meat, coal and the like were sent by sea to Plymouth in large vessels and transferred to the steam packets for Kingsbridge.

Pioneering day excursions were advertised as 'A Grand Devon Coast Cruise' accompanied by a band and refreshments to give Plymothians, for the sum of 2 shillings, the earliest opportunity to visit and view the coastline and Kingsbridge estuary.

Robert Hurrell realised the opportunities in shipping and persuaded local businessmen to invest in the company. The majority of them could offer traffic to the company and they included a miller, coal-merchant, grocer, dairyman, hatter, saddler, iron founder and shipbuilder. There was no competition for many years until a former shareholder William Heath Prowse, the local brewer, set up a rival company based in Salcombe with a larger iron screw driven vessel of 110 tons and to annoy his rivals called his ship 'The Kings Bridge Packet' that maintained a service for over 30 years between New Quay and Sutton Harbour as well as the occasional 'Sunday School Treat' to the tiny quay at Bantham on the River Avon.

Faced with this competition the Kingsbridge Company panicked to order a new ship called the 'South Hams Trader' but Hurrell, Anthony and Beer went bankrupt before this ship came into service and the redoubtable Robert Hurrell acquired the original 'Kingsbridge Packet' from the Admiralty Marshal and continued trading on his own. The 'South Hams Trader' somehow ended her life in Lagos where in 1889 she was sunk and became a breakwater on the Brass River.

Robert Hurrell died in 1883 and his son John Squire Hurrell, the man who welcomed the GWR to Kingsbridge, took over the vessel. He assisted in building a further vessel at Dates Yard, a wooden paddle steamer of 115 tons named 'Express' launched in 1885.

'Express' ran three times weekly to and from Plymouth, leaving one day and returning the next and called at Salcombe. The fare in 1892 was 3/- return First Class and 2/3d Second Class. Obviously trade was insufficient to keep three vessels employed even before the arrival of the railway and the original 'Kingsbridge Packet' was broken up in 1890 whilst the 'Express' was sold in 1894 and later sunk by a U-boat in 1915.



THE EXPRESS BUILT IN 1885 AT DATES YARD BERTHED AT BOND'S QUAY



THE 'EXPRESS' AT BOND'S QUAY



VESSELS INCLUDING 'EXPRESS' UNLOADING AT BOND'S QUAY BUILT AS THE HEAD OF THE ESTUARY SILTED UP WHERE THE DEEP WATER CHANNEL CAME CLOSE TO THE EASTERN BANK

William Prowse, ever the opportunist, then renamed his vessel the 'Kingsbridge Packet' which continued the service until 1908 when it was replaced by a steel screw ship of 128 tons called the 'New Kingsbridge Packet' that only survived in service until 1917, when it was converted to a coaster leaving the estuary, to mark the demise of packet services after 60 years.

The coming of the railway only as far as Kingsbridge heralded an era of prosperity for the local steamer service by increasing the importance of the estuary link to Salcombe. But it also marked the beginning of the end for the coastal packet service with the railway company providing fast, reliable daily goods services linked to the national rail network. Strangely John Squire Hurrell, who welcomed the railway to Kingsbridge, foresaw lean times ahead for the coastal packet service and withdrew 'Express' the month the railway opened.

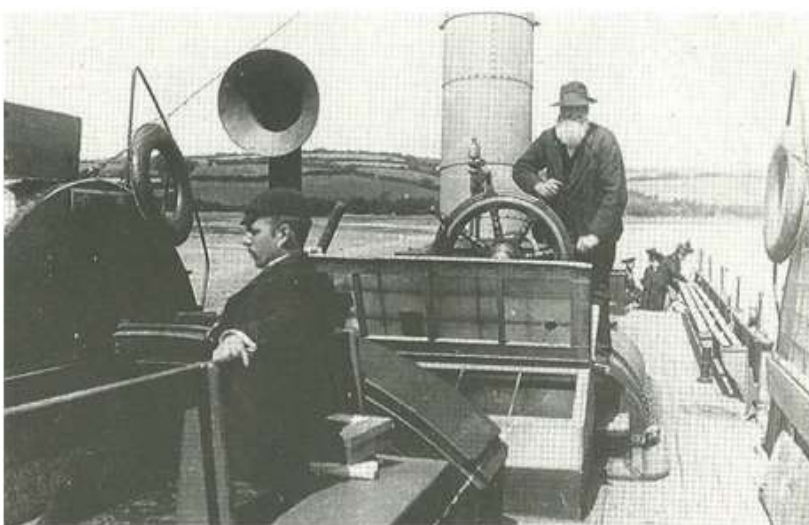
In the second half of the 19th century passenger paddle steamers were built specifically to provide a twice daily local service on the Kingsbridge estuary and were an immediate success. The service started with the 'Queen' built in 1860 in Date's yard, small at only 18

tons, she was replaced by the 'Reindeer' in 1876.



**THE PADDLE STEAMER REINDEER LAUNCHED IN 1875
TO CARRY 250 PASSENGERS**

PS Reindeer was a larger wooden paddle steamer of 44 tons again built in Date's yard for Robert Hurrell, flat-bottomed and drawing only 2 feet of water to navigate the shallow channels of the Estuary and able to carry 250 passengers. Fares until around 1900 were 6d single and 9d return for a First Class 'Best Cabin' and 4d and 6d for second class.



ON THE DECK OF REINDEER

The 'Reindeer' also benefitted from increased revenue generated with the Great Western Railway whose liner tenders based at Plymouth's Millbay Docks offered cruises along the Devon coast calling at Salcombe, where excursionists could continue up the estuary aboard the 'Reindeer'. Another steamer was 'Ringleader', a converted fruit schooner.

The 1880's saw the emergence of a new operator, Nicholas March, based in Salcombe, initially with small steam launches: firstly, 'Lively' then 'Nautilus' destroyed by fire one month after launch and then 'Dart' a larger vessel in 1893.

He also acquired ownership of 'Reindeer'.



STEAM LAUNCH DART

In 1889 he had 'Salcombe Castle' built by Alexander Philip of Dartmouth.



SALCOMBE CASTLE BOARDING PASSENGERS BY SMALL BOAT FROM ROCKS AT SPLATCOVE POINT



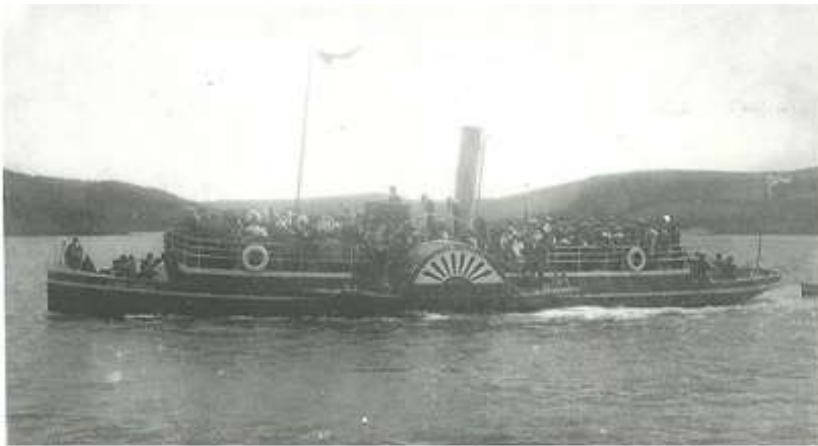
SALCOMBE CASTLE PADDLE STEAMER EXCURSION TO SOUTH SANDS

'Salcombe Castle' was an updated version of 'Reindeer' and with her single funnel and open well decks fore and aft of a small saloon she exhibited all the classic design features which made the South Hams river steamers so uniquely distinctive.



PADDLE STEAMER POSSIBLY SALCOMBE CASTLE PASSING TACKET WOOD CIRCA 1925

'Reindeer' was replaced by the 'Ilton Castle', a steel paddle boat of 53 tons that had its maiden voyage on 21 February 1906 to the strains of the Salcombe Town Band on the foredeck.



ILTON CASTLE ON HER MAIDEN VOYAGE ON 21ST FEBRUARY 1906

Together with 'Salcombe Castle' they plied the estuary three or four times daily as the tide allowed with the occasional excursion trip to Torbay. The proprietor was N March, Steamboat Agent and Waterman, Union Street, Salcombe with Captain Nicolas Southwood. The steamers ran daily throughout the year, Sundays excepted.

Nicholas March died in 1912 leaving his widow to continue with his business partner. The company prospered with passenger numbers warranting a third steamer and the last paddle steamer 'Kenwith Castle' was built in Plymouth in 1914 to the same design as Ilton Castle.

The First World War seriously disrupted services and it never recovered afterwards with ever increasing competition from road transport. The fate of 'Salcombe Castle' is shrouded in mystery but both 'Kenwith Castle' and 'Ilton Castle' were sold to the Great Western Railway in 1927 as

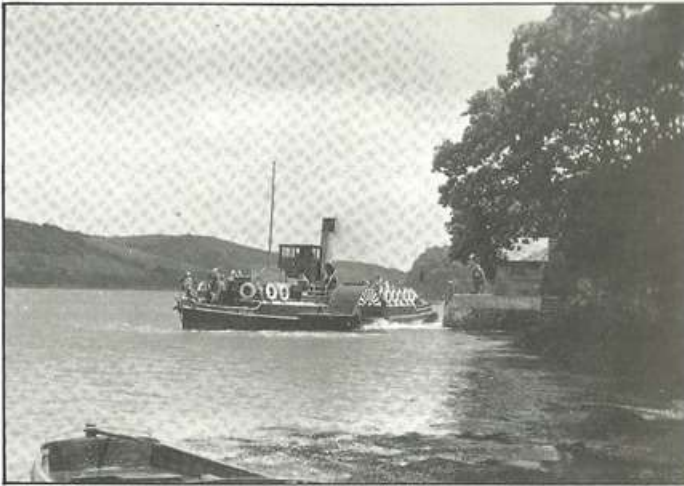


ILTON CASTLE IN SOUTH POOL CREEK – AN IDYLIC SETTING



A CROWDED KENWITH CASTLE

business rapidly declined. The purchase of N March and Co and the steamers by the GWR allowed them to acquire the 'regulated' lorry route between the towns that expanded the haulage interests. Outwardly there was no change to the day to day operation of 'Kenwith Castle' on the estuary, but 'Ilton Castle' had already been laid up. Between 1928 and 1931 'Kenwith Castle' provided summer excursions only, with the regular daily service withdrawn.



KENWITH CASTLE LEAVING EAST PORTLEMOUTH – ANOTHER CLASSIC VIEW



KENWITH CASTLE AT BOND'S QUAY

In the earlier part of the 20th century passengers arriving by train at Kingsbridge Station for onward travel to Salcombe often opted for a placid journey by water and the Kingsbridge and Salcombe passenger steamers provided just what they needed with a conveyance in the station yard to take both passengers and luggage down to the commodious steamboat.

At that time the estuary came right up to Prince of Wales Road and near the head was ample quay room not only for the steamers, but also “for the import and export of merchandise of all descriptions” and it was here that steamer passengers would embark and disembark. When the tide was out, the steamers stopped at Highhouse Point, about a mile from the town. Arriving at the Salcombe end, the steamers made for Custom House quay or, if the tide did not permit this, then the Pier.

Travel by steamer lasted for 90 years, from 1841 to 1931 by which time buses operated by the GWR had taken so much trade from the river. Under the ownership of the GWR the 'Kenwith Castle' had become uneconomic and was laid up off the estuary in 1932 and sold to Southampton operators. Ilton Castle became a house boat for Salcombe Yacht Club.

The paddle steamer era had come to a close. Or had it?



COMPTON CASTLE AT KINGSBRIDGE QUAY

A Paddle Steamer named the 'Compton Castle' had plied its trade as a pleasure boat on the River Dart since 1914 and received a stay of execution from the breakers yard when Messrs Baume and Woods purchased her in 1964. After some restoration work had been carried out, she was moved to Squires Quay in Kingsbridge where she started her static career as a floating museum and teashop until in 1978 she was sold privately to

publican, Ernest Clayton, who had her moved to Looe. During her years in Kingsbridge the “Compton Castle” appeared in various films, and on television.

Rail

In 1893 the railway came to Kingsbridge after nearly sixty years of perseverance and heartache, quarrels between rival railway companies, bankruptcies and lack of investment. It came to be known as the Primrose Line from its route through the beautiful scenic route of the Avon Valley with flower-filled woods, brilliant in spring with primroses and wild daffodils and later bluebells along which the line ran from Kingsbridge to South Brent twelve and a half miles away where it met the main Exeter to Plymouth route. The railway eventually superseded marine transport and the increase number of visitors firmly establishing tourism in the area and revived the paddle steamer excursions; sadly, in turn, the railway fell victim to the Beeching cuts in 1963 to be replaced by speedy cars and heavy goods vehicles.

It was Isambard Kingdom Brunel who first proposed bringing a railway to Kingsbridge as early as 1836 when he surveyed possible routes between Exeter and Plymouth.

Brunel was faced with severe difficulties to bring the South Devon railway through the Haldon Hills south west of Exeter and around the southern edge of Dartmoor to reach Plymouth because he did not have steam engines capable of tackling the steep gradients. Brunel was compelled to consider the now familiar route following the coastline from Starcross, Dawlish and Teignmouth but then via Torquay, over the river Dart to Dartmouth, Torcross, Kingsbridge, Modbury and on to Plymouth.



WATERCOLOUR OF SOUTH CLIFF TUNNEL DAWLISH ON THE SOUTH DEVON ATMOSPHERIC RAILWAY OCTOBER 2 1847

Ironically locomotive design rapidly improved sufficiently to show adequate capability for hill climbing and Brunel abandoned the idea, which would have involved many expensive lineside works, in favour of a route via the Teign estuary, Newton Abbot and over the lower foothills of Dartmoor to Totnes, Ivybridge and Plymouth – the route we know today – which opened in 1848.

In 1859 a Bill was put before parliament for the first of many proposals to bring a direct branch from the main line to Kingsbridge. The cost was estimated at £100,000 at least half to be raised locally. Objections to the bill were raised by the inhabitants of Modbury who still favoured a coastal route to link them with Plymouth, likely to cost in the region of £400,000, when even the £100,000 could not be raised. They petitioned parliament and the bill was thrown out with much recrimination. The alternative route from Plymouth to Dartmouth preferred by Modbury residents also failed through lack of capital.

On 25TH July 1864 an Act was passed to allow the Kingsbridge Railway Company with the support of the South Devon Railway to build a branch leaving the main line west of South Brent but after two years nothing had been started, much to shareholders' annoyance. Minor amendments to the route and a proposal to extend the line to Salcombe enabled the work to begin and by May 1867 three miles of track had been laid between South Brent and Avonwick. However financial pressures remained, the company was insolvent and the rails were sold to settle debts. In 1872 the company tried to renew the scheme but, once again, subscriptions of only £1400 were raised against costs of £160,000 to complete the line.

The rival South Hams Railway company then proposed that the Devon and Cornwall Railway Company's line at Sutton Pool, Plymouth should be extended to Modbury and Kingsbridge, which would have been a circuitous route to reach Kingsbridge and revived the feud with Modbury. This company decided to extend into Cornwall instead.

At last in 1882 the new Kingsbridge and Salcombe Railway Company offered to complete the line using standard gauge rather than Brunel's broad gauge of 7' 01/4", then widespread throughout the West Country, and purchased the four miles of cuttings and three bridges already commenced in 1867. The townsfolk of Kingsbridge remained sceptical having already invested about £30,000 in abortive schemes, but this time, subject to Kingsbridge inhabitants raising £20,000, the backing and security of the Great Western Railway was assured and in 1888 the Kingsbridge and Salcombe Company was taken over by the Great Western Railway much to the consternation of some GWR shareholders. One shareholder questioned "the wisdom of expending £10,000 a mile on the construction of a line to a mere fishing village of 1500 inhabitants". The locals were not amused. I think this is a reference to Salcombe rather than Kingsbridge.

The line was designed by W Clarke, engineer to the Great Western Railway, and was twelve and a half miles long with 48 bridges, crossing the river Avon in 10 places. By the nature of the terrain hugging the narrow Avon valley the railway abounded in curves and twists and there was barely a straight length of track on the whole of the branch from Brent to the buffer stops at Kingsbridge with even this station, built of grey limestone, on a curve



**KINGSBRIDGE STATION SHORTLY BEFORE OPENING DAY
ON 18TH DECEMBER 1893**

for the whole of its length on high ground on the west of the town. The speed restriction throughout the branch was 35mph and the journey time was about 35 minutes. It cost about £180,000 and took nearly 3 years to build. The continuation of the line to Salcombe never materialised mainly because the GWR operated a successful omnibus service instead.

At the grand opening of the line on Monday 18th December 1893 shops closed for a half day, a public luncheon was held and later that day there was a mile long torchlight procession, a firework display staged at Ticket Wood and an invitation dance here at the Kings Arms. At 9pm the church bells of St Edmund Kingsbridge, St Thomas of Dodbrooke and All Saints West Alvington simultaneously rang a peal of welcome. This enthusiastic response from Kingsbridge inhabitants amazed the Great Western Railway Company who had offered 1000 free return tickets to South Brent although no children were allowed to ride on these trains.

Kingsbridge had its railway.



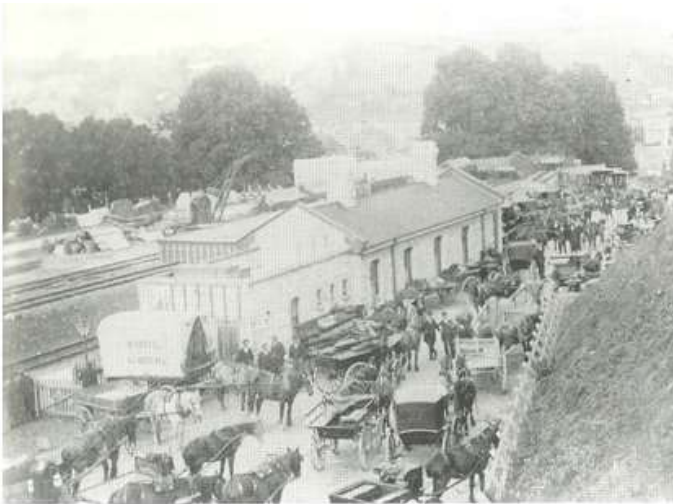
THE OPENING OF THE RAILWAY IN DECEMBER 1893



AN EARLY VIEW OF KINGSBRIDGE STATION

At the opening ceremony the Directors of the GWR warned of hard times to come but from the start traffic greatly exceeded expectations. At the first Christmas over 300 people travelled each way on the branch. Space outside the station was totally inadequate to meet the needs of vehicles that came to meet the trains.

On 27th December 20 1893 workmen removed part of the bank behind the station against the Salcombe Road and built a retaining wall. Later the station was extended, additional sidings and a bay platform added (two pictures on the left below show the station crowded with horse-drawn carts and carriages in 1916 and a contrasting view in 1950).



A CROWDED STATION YARD BEFORE 1916

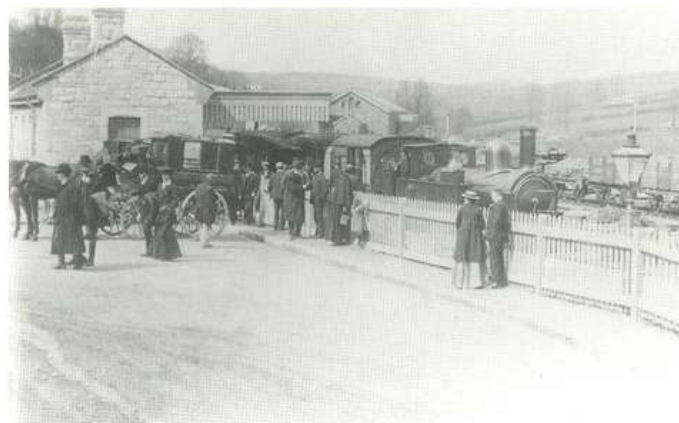


ENTRANCE TO KINGSBRIDGE STATION CIRCA 1900



THE SAME VIEW IN 1950

Kingsbridge Station was always called the Station at the Gateway to the South Hams and handled large amounts of goods traffic as well as passengers.



THE SALCOMBE COACH AWAITS THE ARRIVING TRAIN AT KINGSBRIDGE

In 1903 the Kingsbridge and Salcombe Guide included a section “How to get to Kingsbridge”, an enlightening account of travel in the early 20th century.

“Until quite recently the usual way was by coach, either from Kingsbridge Road Station (now Wrangaton) or Plymouth on the main line of the Great western Railway but in either case being over 12 miles away. The Kingsbridge public are now much better off in this respect as they can boast a good service of trains, a terminus of their own and all the advantages which come with the easier transit of passengers, and the prompt and frequent arrival and dispatch of goods.

The cheapest and most delightful way of reaching Kingsbridge from London is to many people that afforded by the London and Irish Line of steamers which call at Plymouth, running in connection with the GWR trains.

Others come in by train to Kingswear and travel by coach usually breaking the journey in Dartmouth to see the old world town and then enjoy the trip along the picturesque coast passing the celebrated fresh water fishing lake called Slapton Ley and through the very pretty villages which line the route from Dartmouth to Kingsbridge. – The coaches are punctual, well-appointed and carefully driven; and passengers can always rely on the civility and intelligence of the drivers in charge.

It will be seen that in any case the Great Western Railway “rules the roost”, and indeed 90% of visitors to the district will come straight away from Paddington or other places on its line by swift and convenient trains e.g. one for instance leaving London after breakfast at 9am and arriving at Kingsbridge before teatime at 4 40pm.

On comparing a timetable for 1857 with one for the present day (1903) we find the former shows that at that time there was actually only one third class train daily from London and this left Paddington at 6 o’clock in the morning and deposited Kingsbridge passengers at the Kingsbridge Road Station, and situated ten miles from Kingsbridge at 6 21pm, where the Coach took them forward and arrived with them in Kingsbridge at 8pm, the whole journey thus occupying no less than 14 hours. Travel by “expresses” reserved for first and second class passengers but at twice the fare, we find occupied about ten hours in reaching Kingsbridge Road, to which must be added the Coach journey of an hour and a half and it will thus be seen that the quickest possible time in which the journey from London could then be performed was nearly twelve hours.

Today the Time Table of the Great Western Railway shows that there are five fast trains daily from Paddington all carrying third class passengers by means of which the journey from and to London is now comfortably done in from six to seven hours.

The coaches from Kingsbridge to Torcross and Dartmouth leave Kingsbridge at 10am and 2pm.

Torcross at 12 noon and 3.30pm, arriving at Dartmouth 1.45pm and 5.15pm.



THE DARTMOUTH COACH AT KINGSBRIDGE STATION CIRCA 1900

For Kingsbridge they leave Dartmouth at 11 15am and 3 55pm, Torcross at 8am, 12 50pm and 5 35pm, arriving in Kingsbridge at 9 10am, 1 50pm, and 6 40pm.

In 1906 further plans were put forward for the expansion of the railway through South Hams, with the proposed extension of the

Plymstock to Yealmpton line through Modbury linking with the Primrose Line at Kingsbridge Station and a separate light railway of 2' 6" gauge from Kingsbridge through Charleton, Frogmore, Chillington, Stokenham and Torcross to Slapton Sands terminating at the Royal Sands Hotel. As we now know these plans, like others, never came to fruition. How interesting to think what could have been.



THE DARTMOUTH COACH PREPARES TO LEAVE KINGSBRIDGE STATION



PASSENGERS BOARDING A TRAIN AT KINGSBRIDGE STATION CIRCA 1914

It became the fashion amongst Victorians and Edwardians to come down by steam train along this idyllic branch line to Kingsbridge and take a paddle steamer trip around the estuary.

In the 1930's the South Hams was a popular holiday centre for the

wealthy. Hotels enjoyed a high class of patronage. Many others owned luxury holiday villas dotted around the coastline and travelled down in the early summer and the various house parties brought passengers to the branch and the parcels traffic was considerable, mostly coming from the principal London stores.

Few lines as this had such a consistent service with six down weekday trains in almost every year of operation. There were sometimes additional journeys one Wednesdays and Saturdays, but only occasionally was there a train service on Sundays. The weekday Cornish Riviera Express carried a through coach for Kingsbridge detached at Exeter to connect with a local service and attached to the up train at Newton Abbot.

From 1950 to its closure in 1963 a feature of the timetable was a direct through train from Paddington on summer Saturdays. At the peak of holidaying by train in the South West in the late 1950's a branch train of six carriages left Kingsbridge on a Saturday at 10 55am and ran fast to Brent where it was coupled to an 8 coach train from Plymouth, such as on 9 July 1960, when doubled headed King Edward 1 and Dumbleton Hall locomotives hauled the 14 coach train over the steep Devon banks to Newton Abbot on what is regarded as the busiest day ever of trains running to and from the West Country. For the record it arrived 55 minutes late at Paddington. Amazingly there were 24 up trains that day from Devon to Paddington and 23 down trains to the West in addition to services to Birmingham, Wales and beyond.

Goods traffic was a considerable feature of the line. Kingsbridge was a busy centre for rabbit traffic.

The rabbits were packed 20-24 brace in wicker hampers weighing about 1 cwt mainly consigned to Birmingham and the Midlands, up to 25 tons a week with the return working conveying live pigeons. Most branch passenger trains conveyed an additional goods van such as for shellfish, mainly landed at Beesands and delivered in later years by Ned



LOADING RABBITS ONTO THE BRANCH TRAIN

Stear. As much as 25 tons of crabs and lobsters a week were dispatched to London (Billingsgate), Birmingham and Southampton for ocean liners. During the 1920's good harvests meant there was a large surplus of cider apples and as much as 1000 tons were loaded into wagons for Henly's brewery at Newton Abbot.

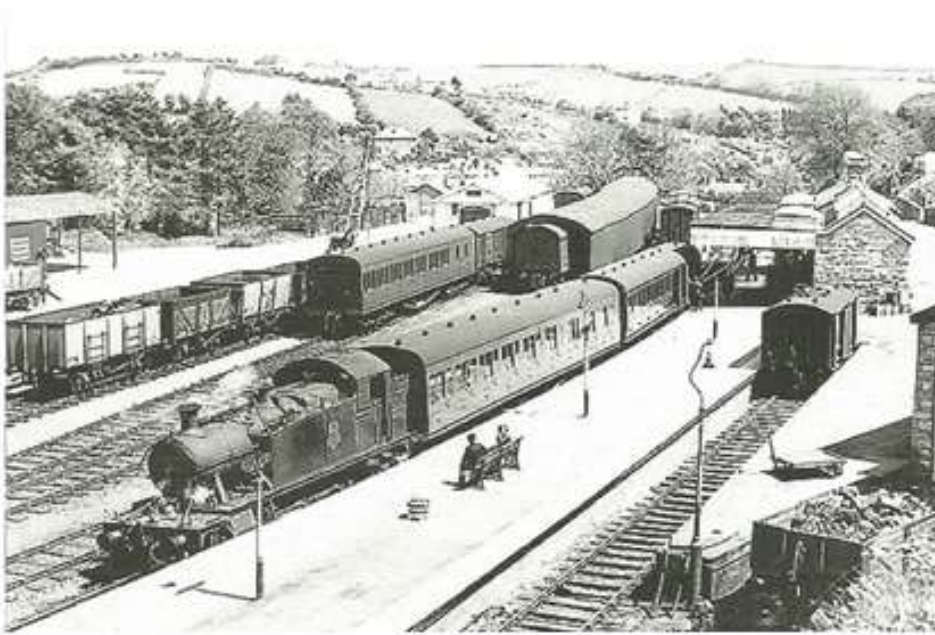
In pre-war days during Kingsbridge Fair Week in July as many as 120 livestock wagons would be loaded and worked away as special trains, often double-headed.

The line was of strategic importance during the Second World War, particularly the build-up to D-Day. General Eisenhower's train spent several days in Kingsbridge and Field Marshal Montgomery used the line twice, firstly to review American troops training in the area and second in 1944 during Exercise Tiger. Both transported their cars on the train – a giant American car for Eisenhower but a more dignified Rolls-Royce for Montgomery. It is recorded that Monty often took walks around Kingsbridge, usually on his own, quite unconcerned by his rank or position as Britain's most famous General and apparently oblivious to security. He always had a friendly word and greeting for the staff and locals. Earlier in 1941 the railway was used to convey many children evacuated from London and Bristol to Kingsbridge.

A feature of the branch stations were the beautifully tended station gardens. Kingsbridge Station won 1st prize in 1960 and 2nd in the subsequent 3 years and the station was well kept right to the end. Gas lighting remained up to closure in 1963.



A GENERAL VIEW OF A QUIET KINGSBRIDGE STATION IN 1958



A BUSY KINGSBRIDGE STATION IN BR DAYS WITH THE ESTUARY BEYOND

Rumours of closure were rife as early as the summer of 1962; it seemed as if there was a deliberate policy of running down the line, particularly as over the previous 2 years connections had become poor with longer waits at Brent. For example, there was a departure from Kingsbridge at 8am with an arrival at Plymouth at 9.57am, a journey time of almost 2 hours with a wait at Brent of 45 minutes. Previously, the train left at 7.35am with arrival at Plymouth at 8.45am. Surely this drove passengers to other forms of transport.



A BEAUTIFUL EARLY SUMMER EVENING IN 1961 ON THE BRANCH

The evaluation system used for closures was very harsh as only revenue from passengers and goods within the branch was included with through bookings, of which there many on the Kingsbridge branch, discounted. The heavy seasonal summer Saturday traffic was also uneconomic with the additional rolling stock required remaining idle for much of the year.



NEARING THE END OF THE LINE

The British Railways Board had no incentive to try and save the line. The battle to keep the line open began with formal notice of closure posted on 27th March 1962. Petitions and joint meetings with local Councils followed and Devon County Council objected to the piecemeal closure of branch lines. The financial case for closure was only disclosed by BR at the Public Inquiry but appeared to include discrepancies – inflated wage costs and unexplained low estimated revenues compared with recent years that distorted the losses expected per annum to over £21000 as well as the effect of the unsatisfactory changes to the timetable.

The Goods traffic was not disclosed to the Inquiry but staff estimated the tonnage in 1962 was in excess of 12000 tons, with the local coal merchant - John Westcott Ltd accounting for approx. 3000 tons – but traffic rapidly fell away to road haulage as local businesses prepared for the inevitable closure. Amazingly it was estimated that it would cost an additional 10 shillings per ton to bring in the coal by road from Totnes and reimbursement was obtained by Westcott's from BR by way of compensation. The NFU objected with concern over the transshipment of perishable food and livestock.

It is interesting to note that traffic on the branch line increased by around 25% in the last twelve months of running and the Summer Saturdays through train to Paddington was packed out during the summer months before closure. As late as August 31st, a fortnight before closure, the 9 10am through train to Paddington with 4 coaches and some 200 aboard, with no ticket revenue apportioned to the branch, pulled out of Kingsbridge. Incredible that a line which could support such a service was about to be wiped of the map

However on 16th September 1963, after a long and bitter fight to keep the line open with no last minute reprieve, rail enthusiasts from far and wide came to join hundreds of local people to take a farewell trip or watch the last trains go by and a scene of flag waving cheering and fun. The last train at 7.20pm from Kingsbridge, garlanded with a wreath, departed with over 400 people crammed into 3 carriages whilst more than 200 people watched it leave



THE LAST TRAIN ARRIVES AT KINGSBRIDGE

Amazingly a Mr Huxham witnessed both the opening and closure of the line. He said that on the first day everywhere was bright and gay whilst the locomotive was gleaming, with brasswork shining and carriages resplendent in the familiar GWR colours. Sadly he stood in a field near the cutting at Sorley and waited for the last train. Into view came a dark and shabby diesel train, looking very dirty. What a sad contrast to the elegant train of the GWR 70 years before



PASSENGERS FOR THE FINAL TRAIN AT KINGSBRIDGE STATION

A verse at the time expressed the feelings of many:

Yet here on this evening by the setting sun
 A busy little branch railway was closed for all time to come.
 Now one hundred years have passed on by since the first running of the train
 Nature has taken back the route which was hers by right
 The line now rests in peace, in memories
 Dreams, of what was a branch line delight

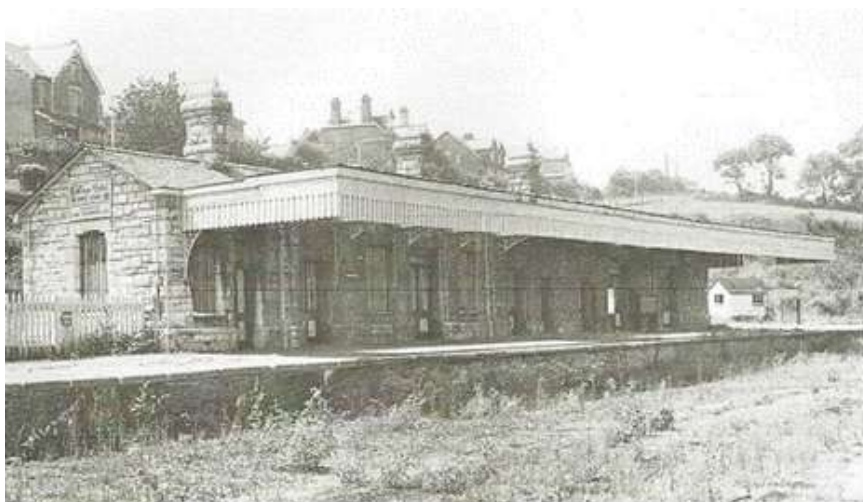
A spirited attempt to preserve the Primrose Line as a heritage railway initially looked promising with a lot of local interest, including the local MP, local Urban and Rural District Councils and Kingsbridge Rotarians at the invitation of the Rector of Dodbrooke.

Sadly, unknown to the preservation group who were rapidly raising funds and negotiating amicably and reasonably with the Divisional Manager at Plymouth, the Civil Engineer's Department at Paddington had tendered a contract for lifting the permanent way and wrought iron bridges and they would not consider further delay to allow the preservation Society to complete the Purchase despite the support of local Councils

The campaign failed at the 11th hour through the corporate duplicity and intransigence of the British Railways Board and the rails were lifted at Kingsbridge Station within three hours of the final meeting of the Preservation Committee on 25th November when they were presented with a fait accompli that a contract had been let. The British Railways Board attached great importance to the quick realisation of scrap value to provide further capital for financing the modernisation of the network.

It is reputed that the track was sold to an eastern European country for reuse as the branch had only been re-laid with new track 2 years before.

The figure quoted by British Railways to purchase the line and land was just over £24000 for the track, road and river bridges and signalling equipment. Funds of approximately £20000 had been raised and with the cooperation of the Great Western Society stock would be found to operate the line. The demolition contract was let for £18000 and that was the end of any preservation scheme.



Gone With Regret.

The station was demolished in 2008 and the site today is used by the local 'Tally Ho' bus company and as an industrial estate.

KINGSBRIDGE STATION DISUSED



For the time being the Goods Shed remains.

GOODS SHED AT KINGSBRIDGE STATION – SURVIVING BUT FOR HOW LONG?

Motor Buses

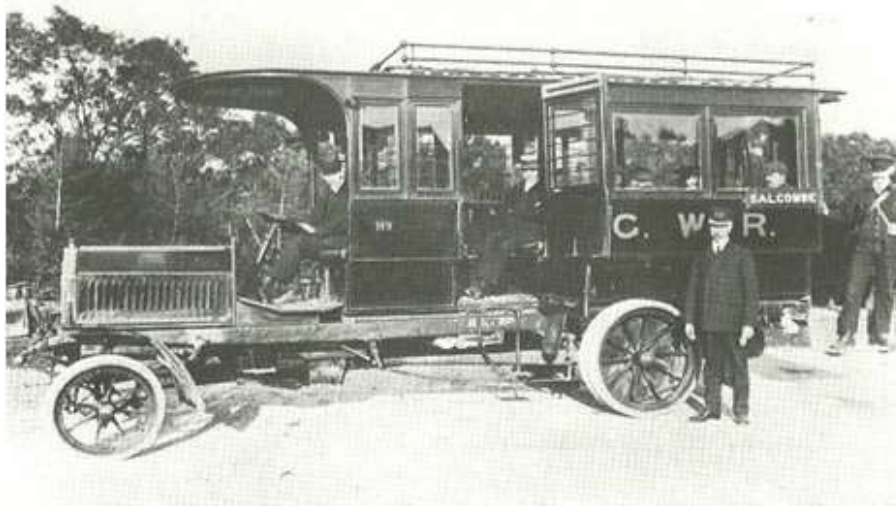
The earliest motor vehicles had solid tyres, with imaginable consequences for passengers' comfort. When pneumatic tyres first followed they often proved too fragile for the load they had to bear and were liable to be punctured on the rough, unmade roads. When they avoided punctures, mechanical parts such as axles broke as a result of violent jolting.

However The Great Western Railway pioneered 'Road Motors' from 1903 onwards and the South Hams area was virtually a GWR preserve centred on Kingsbridge Station.

The first GWR service from Kingsbridge was to Salcombe started on 21st July 1909 but earlier in 1903 it had resisted running a service due to the challenge of the steep gradients and narrow roads. At that time a syndicate of London businessmen had arrived in Kingsbridge intent on bringing electricity to the town. They were persuaded by locals to promote a bus service in 1904 but it lasted only 5 weeks and ultimately failed but what an eventful 5 weeks it was.

At midday on Tuesday 12th July 1904 a large crowd watched the first chauffeur driven car leave the Albion Hotel but it was very underpowered and had difficulty climbing the hills, suffered from mechanical problems and also crashed two days later outside the Kingsbridge Inn on Kingsbridge Hill, Totnes, conveying the Kingsbridge cricket team to a match.

On 2nd August a new more powerful motor omnibus was introduced – named 'Dartmoor' - after a successful trip over the moor on the Bank Holiday – the first vehicle of its kind and size to traverse the moor. It had a very successful first trip to Salcombe and when Bolt Head came into view one of the London promoters, who had travelled all over the Continent said "it was the prettiest sight he had ever seen and he questioned whether the world contained any view more beautiful". Soon however lengthy delays through minor breakdowns, 'holiday congestion' and missed connections with the train led to impatience with the failure to provide a reliable service. It was suspended in December 1904 and the licence cancelled. No other service was provided until the GWR inaugurated the Salcombe route in 1909.



THE SALCOMBE BUS IN 1909 WITH STATIONMASTER SALMON

There were a few wayside shelters provided by the GWR whilst at one rather exposed crossroads at Malborough the upstairs room of a cottage was rented for waiting passengers.

The GWR opened a service to Modbury on 14th October 1909, Dartmouth on 30th June 1919 and Plymouth on 25th March 1921.

July 1924 saw the introduction of services to Hope Cove and Thurlestone and the motor bus business prospered. Further growth took place in 1925 with a regular service to Totnes extended to Haytor on summer Sundays and new routes to Torcross and East Portlemouth.



**GWR OMNIBUS AT KINGSBRIDGE 17TH MARCH 1925
REBUILT AS A LORRY IN 1926**



SIDE VIEW OF GWR OMNIBUS

This GWR omnibus was rebuilt as a lorry in 1926.

Later a market day service was added to Dartmouth via Halwell in 1926, Kingsbridge to Loddiswell and finally a service to South Pool in 1928.

By now the Salcombe route was causing grave financial problems to the river traffic. These and other routes became part of Western National in 1929 until Saturday 31st July 1971 when the Kingsbridge garage closed and Western National withdrew its operations with a drastic cutback in services.



WESTERN NATIONAL BUS AT LAIRA BRIDGE ROAD GARAGE PLYMOUTH

During the Second War more and more women were engaged to replace the shortage of manpower but suitable female accommodation posed a few problems. In Kingsbridge this was solved by renting part of Shear's Café on the Quay.

However the GWR did not have it all its own way. After the end of the 1914-1918 war serious competition grew steadily when road transport came into its own and many small companies, independent owners and private operators came into existence. The need to change trains at Brent and the roundabout route by rail gave the new road operators an advantage which they exploited to the full. 'Bluebell', 'Poppy' and 'South Hams Charabancs' became familiar sights in the neighbourhood.

In April 1920 William Oliver Greener of O.Greener and Co, of Rosemount Garage, Salcombe notified the relevant authorities of his intention to start a motor service in Salcombe serving Kingsbridge, Totnes and Newton Abbot. The Greeners came from Ealing and it is not clear how they came to be running a bus service in Salcombe. They purchased a 14 seater Crossley with an aluminium body in Plymouth but in the event they only ran a restricted service on a Saturday afternoon between Salcombe, Hope Cove and Kingsbridge. The bus left Salcombe, to Malborough and then down and back to Hope Cove before proceeding to Kingsbridge arriving 1 and 1/2 hours later. This offered Salcombe residents and visitors a slow and rather circuitous route and cannot have provided much competition for the GWR Motor Bus although the Hope Cove – Kingsbridge facility was new and very welcome. However it lasted little more than a year and the vehicle was sold in July 1921.

Earlier in July 1919 Edwin Noyce based at Island House, Ebrington Street, Kingsbridge, bought a lorry which could also be fitted with bench seats for passengers to enjoy pleasure trips, tours and outings such as to the Newton Abbot races. At the end of the summer he built up a service to Plymouth during the winter for shopping or a football match followed by the theatre or a drink or two in one of the many hostelrys – return fare 6 shillings in an uncovered wagon. In 1921 he purchased an AEC motor bus with comfortable tip up seats for 22 passengers and adopted the name 'Bluebell' for his charabanc services and extended the service to Salcombe in 1922 but travelled to Plymouth via California Cross, Wrangaton, Ivybridge and Plympton.

In 1923 he purchased a second charabanc with 14 seats named 'Poppy' after the colour scheme of its previous owner. In 1924 pneumatic tyres were fitted to the vehicle with considerable improvement to the ride and comfort. The company of E & B R Noyce prospered and the catchment areas for tours greatly expanded with passengers able to join coaches in Thurlestone, Hope Cove, South Milton, Malborough, Torcross, Frogmore and Chillington with local agents appointed in each of these villages to take bookings. In 1932 Edwin and Beatrice Rhoda Noyce sold the business for £3500 with seven Lancia coaches, one 8 seater Vauxhall car together with a garage at Rack Park to Western National.

The Noyce family retained their other business interests continuing into the 21st century.

Oke Bros, Ironmongers and Cycle Agents, of 74 Fore Street, Kingsbridge started a small charabanc service in 1921 but sold out to Edwin Noyce in 1923.

Mr Trembath of Quay Garage Co Ltd also started in 1921 with one 14 seater charabanc for excursions and tours. In August 1924 a second 18 seater char-a-banc entered service but by 1927 fares had halved from those charged in 1922. Attempts to build up the business were thwarted as tours to Bigbury, Thurlestone, Salcombe, Totnes, Hope Cove and Blackpool Sands were not allowed to compete with Western National services. However, it survived the longest before selling out to Western National in 1935 although this company declined his two vehicles which were scrapped and his tours embodied with their own, acquiring the licences for £25. Trembath's today are still involved in the motor business.

Perhaps the most interesting operator is Philip Trant of The Quay, Kingsbridge who had been involved with the ill-fated scheme to run motors between Kingsbridge and Salcombe in the early 1900's. He converted in September 1919, firstly, a steam road locomotive used in connection with his milling and merchanting business and then a lorry normally used to fetch wheat and deliver flour but was stripped back to its chassis and a seating part for up to 34 passengers, made purposely, added when required.



**TRANT'S FIRST CHARABANC ON THE CHASSIS OF A LORRY IN JUNE 1921
THE DRIVER IS ERNIE LANE EMPLOYED BY THE MILL FOR MANY YEARS**

In 1922 Trant purchased two vehicles fitted with 14 and 23 seater bodies and traded under the name 'South Hams Motor Coach' – for comfort and reliability – allowing the Dennis lorry to return to goods duties. There is no record of passenger carrying trips after 1924 with Trant's Mill concentrating on their milling business although both vehicles remained in Trant's ownership for some years, seemingly converted into lorries.

Few of these independent operators were ultimately successful with too much competition for pleasure trips and outings in the summer and no alternative use for the char-a-bancs in winter especially as the early vehicles did not have any cover against the rain.

In post war years another local garage, Kingsbridge Motor Works entered the coach business. By the late 1930's it was known as Majestic Motors being run by Mr Viv Richards and after the Second World War by his widow Emily Richards. In July 1949 a 28 seat Bedford bus was purchased new and operated under the fleet name "Primrose Coaches". At the end of that year the County Council invited tenders for the conveyance of schoolchildren between Hope Cove and Kingsbridge.

This had been a problem for some years due to the high price demanded by Western National and the short supply of coaches that had precluded other operators from tendering. Mrs Richards submitted a highly competitive price of £1 4s a day compared with £3 6s a day quoted by Western National. Naturally she won the tender to commence operations in January 1950 but soon realised her price was uneconomic. She negotiated a revised price of £2 6s 8d from June 1950. The business expanded with further school contracts and a fleet of five coaches but the rates for both school contracts and private hire remained highly competitive and in 1957 Mr J Prowse bought the business only to sell it again within six months because of poor profitability. The school contracts were broken up and the Hope Cove contract was acquired by Mr M J Wray.

Michael Wray, born in Scunthorpe, was a Pilot Officer in the Second World War, and came to Kingsbridge to manage the Kingsbridge Motor Works Garage. He married Mrs Richards and was a town councillor for over 30 years. The business was known as Wray's garage with one coach used on the school contract until Mr Wray's retirement in 1987.

However one company remains in business today although from very different beginnings;

Tally Ho

In 1923 a farmer called J H (Jimmy) Clark who lived at The Mounts near Kingsbridge and bred rabbits for a living converted his lorry into a charabanc at weekends to take passengers for pleasure tours and named the vehicle 'Tally Ho! Sunshine coach'. This business grew and he started to operate school services during the week and day trips at weekends.

Shortly after in 1926 a William Wellington posted a notice in the Kingsbridge area stating: "W. Wellington begs to announce that he has purchased a ton lorry and is open to do any kind of light hauling . . . 2 Belle Vue Road, Dodbrooke".

The vehicle was a Ford 20hp, which he too used it either as a lorry body for goods haulage or with a bus body for passenger carrying. The business developed with a mixture of goods and passenger transport and the conveyance of children to and from Kingsbridge schools contracted by Devon County Council. On non-school days private party outings were undertaken.

In the post war years William Wellington was joined by his son Jim, who took over the running of the business in the 1950's when the title became W. Wellington & Son. The coach business at this time used the fleet name "Kingsbridge Belle", and the firm was also involved in furniture removals and cattle haulage.

It is clear both Jimmy Clark and William Wellington had the same idea and were offering a similar service.

In February 1960 Jim Wellington and Desmond Gullett acquired the coach business run by Jim Clark. Together they formed 'Tally Ho! Coaches Ltd.' which they operated from The Mounts, East Allington. The goods haulage and 'Kingsbridge Belle' operations owned by Jim were run separately from Kingsbridge. In 1964 the 'Kingsbridge Belle' coach operations were gradually integrated with Tally Ho! Coaches Ltd.

It was then not long before the decision was taken to expand, and the Salcombe Motor Company and Walls of Dartmouth were acquired, the first of many acquisitions over the years.

In 1971 Tally Ho! owned a large purpose built garage constructed on an industrial estate in Kingsbridge (originally the old Great Western Railway terminus for the South Brent to Kingsbridge line), which is still the base for the business in Kingsbridge. Jim took up residence next door with his fleet of removal vans.

Also in 1971 saw the withdrawal of bus services by Western National and South Hams District Council asked Tally Ho! and South Milton Coaches to fill the gap. In 1972 Tally Ho! acquired South Milton Coaches.

Further area of expansion for Tally Ho! took place in 1975 with the acquisition of J. Hoare and Sons of Ivybridge (Ivy Coaches). In 1979 Galpin of Plymouth (Sunshine Coaches) were taken over.

In 1984 after a number of years of ill health, Mr. Gullett retired. Jim Wellington struck a deal with him on the back of an old envelope and on the 1st April 1984 Wellington and Partners, trading as Tally Ho! Coaches as we know it today was formed. Simon Wellington became General Manager and later in 1989 became a partner in the business.

The most recent expansion of Tally Ho! was in January 1999 when the vehicles and routes of Stevens of Modbury were taken over. This meant loss of 'The Harrier' another old time fleet name.

In April 2000 to accommodate the large fleet of vehicles the yard next door to the Kingsbridge depot was acquired from GW Weymouth Agricultural Engineers.

Simon Wellington retired due to ill health in 2008 and the business was sold to Richard Pullan and Don McIntosh who brought in a new livery to bring back the traditional blue and white colours in a modern style. The business was streamlined, the vehicles were refurbished and updated and a new Holiday business was established.

Today Tally Ho! has 44 coaches and buses in its fleet, and over 60 full and part time staff. At the last count some 25 school runs to 5 different schools are undertaken with 5 Monday to Saturday bus services and several one-day only services. The Private hire fleet is busy and increasingly involved in holiday tours.

Michael Day

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