

Two centuries of Public Transport in Dorstone

By Maurice Church

Very little is recorded about public transport in Dorstone before 1820. Like most villages in Britain, Dorstone would have been self-contained, with various wells at nearby farms for water, a mill to process flour for bread and farmers providing milk and occasionally meat. The large houses had extensive vegetable gardens. Transport out of the village would be along tracks to neighbouring villages. Visitors would be camping peddlers and the cattle drovers. Most cattle drovers passed north of the Wye, missing Golden Valley.

In 1832 a new **turnpike road** was proposed, providing a straight section leaving "Custard Corner" (or the western entry to Dorstone) to beyond Lower Crossways Farm, thereby deleting two double bends on the B4382. At its centre, it would have crossed the road where the railway crossing emerged later in the century.

This new road would have been from Hardwick via Peterchurch then directly to Skenfrith, leaving out Bacton, for instance. It would have linked the Golden Valley to the major transport of the age - the **horse-drawn tramways** linking Abergavenny to Hereford and another from Hay to Brecon, which moved coal north and food south. The proposed road was never built because it did not include a major market town en route. A Dorstone farmer appeared in 1850 at Hay Petty Sessions for taking his sheep through Cusop Dingle, and thereby avoiding the turnpike toll gates on the Hardwick road.

On the 8th December 1841 a **mail coach** called the "**Prince of Wales**" was introduced from Hay to London, via Ross, Gloucester and Oxford. It was subsidised with £70 for the first six months by local landowners - the Revd. Thomas Percy Prosser Powell of Dorstone was one of the driving forces. This service went through the Golden Valley to Ross, where it connected with six other routes. The service progressed to Gloucester and Oxford, before arriving only 12 hours later in London. The fare to Ross cost 6 shillings, and to London 32 shillings. If you required an inside seat, the fare increased to 10 shillings and 50 shillings. This service continued until at least 1849. Another service called the "**Lily of the Valley**" ran from Builth Wells to Cheltenham, via the Golden Valley on alternate days, so we can assume the "Prince of Wales" probably ran on alternate days also.

From 1875, landowners and shopkeepers tried to bring the modern **steam railway** to Golden Valley. This was achieved in 1881 when a line was opened from Dorstone to Pontrilas. The highlight of the village in 1903 would have been Dorstone railway station with 5,072 passengers passing through in a year. By this time the line, actually in 1889, was also linked to Hay. Passengers dwindled from this number, but with 2125 parcels being despatched and 197 tons of coal being received, this kept the staff busy. During the railway's 60 years of service, no new houses were built in the parish, so gradually the annual use of this asset diminished. Not one passenger bought a season ticket - as commuters do these days. The population of Dorstone declined from 730 in 1901 to 586 by 1961.

The introduction of the railways and their fixed timetables brought the **clocks** forward by 12 minutes in Dorstone, and a cannon was fired in Hereford at noon. The telegraph system

was not fully introduced to Golden Valley with the railway network. It is known that the train drivers stopped to shoot rabbits and delayed departures to allow the Dorstone school teacher her ride home - the clock was not important in Golden Valley!

At the same time as the railway, Mr Thomas Maddox from Dorstone was running a 12-seater wagon for goods and passengers to Hereford on Wednesdays and Saturdays, which left Dorstone at 7am and returning to the village at 9pm. Mr Maddox was quite well known for having baskets hanging on the side of the cart to allow passengers more seating inside.

It was only in 1869 that the cattle drovers stopped bringing livestock through the valley due to severe drought. The roads and tracks were not maintained in winter till a **steam roller** was purchased in 1896 to assist in pushing rocks into the ground. The steam rolling ceased in 1920 with the death of Leonard Mills, its travelling driver. In 1906 the local council was pouring tar over the hard packed ground to maintain the roads for longer periods.

From the county's records, there were only seven lorries registered in the whole of Herefordshire. A petrol pump came to Dorstone in 1925 with the increase in motorised transport. A bus service operated by "Red & White" started in 1930 from Hay to Hereford via Dorstone. The last train left Dorstone station on 31st January 1953.