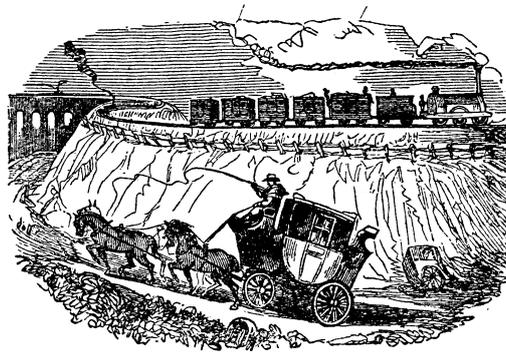


VINTAGE WORDS OF WISDOM

# THE RAILWAY AGE

BY

CYRIL BRUYN ANDREWS



**Figure 1:** Woodcut from Roscoe's *London & Birmingham Railway*



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## PUBLISHERS' FOREWORD

This **Vintage Words of Wisdom** title was first published in 1937. Ninety-nine years earlier, in 1838, the London and Birmingham Railway was opened: the first intercity railway into London with its terminus at Euston and providing a direct connection to Coventry, Birmingham and onwards to the North-West. This signalled an acceleration in the construction of railways and a period of railway mania that swept the country.

As Cyril Andrews explains in his fascinating summary of the development of the railways in the nineteenth century, it brought about fundamental transformations to the nation. It changed the landscape, demanded new engineering and technological advances, opened up new opportunities for commerce and perhaps most importantly ushered in changes to society as people now had the means to travel further, faster and easier than ever before.

Inevitably there was opposition. Concerns about the effect of high speed upon the human body and fear of the injurious effects of the tunnels were raised, but medical evidence was brought forward to show that such fears were 'perfectly futile and groundless'.

Landowners objected to railways traversing their property or interfering with their view but the power was with the developers and those advocating progress and Parliament usually passed the necessary bills to enable construction to proceed. However, as the author, points out this was often at severe cost to the railway companies themselves:

The engineering costs, great as they were, and in some cases double what had been anticipated, were by no means the only great expense. The Parliamentary and legal expenses that the early railways had to bear were enormous. The statistics of these Parliamentary and legal costs are almost beyond belief; these often came to many thousands per mile of railway, and to give only one example, the early South Eastern Railway spent in one year alone a quarter of a million pounds on solicitors' fees.

A significant display of support for the railways was demonstrated when, in 1842, Queen Victoria embarked aboard a train in Slough for the short ride to Paddington. The Queen's endorsement proved most beneficial and the various railway companies clamoured for royal patronage.

Unfortunately accidents were a common feature of the railways and *Punch* magazine suggested with a nod to the class issues of the time (and with tongue firmly in cheek we hope) that 'Behind each engine let there be second and third class carriages, so that, in the event of a smash, second and third class lives only would be sacrificed'. Thankfully lessons were learned and appropriate measures put in place to improve the safety and comfort of all concerned.

The social impact of the railways is well covered. The author considers the effect upon the various strata of society and how railways improved the working lives of those like the commercial traveller, introduced the concept of the commuter and enabled those in want of entertainment. Apparently 15,000 people in 1848 travelled by train to Coventry to see a revival of Lady Godiva's ride through the streets!

Profusely illustrated with over 80 plates and photographs and accompanied by 50 line drawings and cartoons, *The Railway Age* takes a broad approach to its subject that considers more the impact and effect that railways had rather than just the technology itself. So we read about station architecture, railway hotels, speculators and the beginnings of the London underground,

with the text interspersed with poetry and popular songs of the period. There are several plates of lithographs by the famous early railway artist J.C. Bourne, as well as *Punch* cartoons, entries from *The Comic Bradshaw* and many other rare and fascinating images.

*The Railway Age* is a welcome addition to the *Vintage Words of Wisdom* series and will appeal both to the railway enthusiast as well as anyone with an interest in social history and, in particular, the industrialisation of Britain.



*Royalty on the Rail-road*

**Frontispiece:** The Royal Rail-road Carriage (Great Western Railway), from a coloured lithograph by Dean & Co., of 1840.

The painting used on the front cover is *Cardiff Docks* by Lionel Walden.

## VINTAGE WORDS OF WISDOM

The **Vintage Words of Wisdom** titles are not simply facsimiles of old books. They have been carefully selected and professionally produced as high quality ebooks. Our aim is to make the best vintage books on popular topics of interest more widely available again. The books range from practical titles that include wisdom from times past to unashamedly nostalgic works that will appeal to those who may remember these or similar titles from their childhood. Often amusing and quaint, these vintage volumes also contain wise words and advice that may have been forgotten in the intervening years. So often it is worth revisiting the past to remind ourselves that the best ideas stand the test of time. Above all, the **Vintage Words of Wisdom** titles are highly entertaining and provide a fascinating snapshot of life in days gone by. We have chosen books with wonderful illustrations, exciting stories of daring and adventure, practical advice and charming nostalgic descriptions of a simpler life.

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*The Railway Age*

*Sky Roads of the World*

*Lillie London's Needlework Book*

*The Cottage Farm Month by Month*

For further details and the most up-to-date information on our titles please visit our website [www.wordstothewise.co.uk](http://www.wordstothewise.co.uk)

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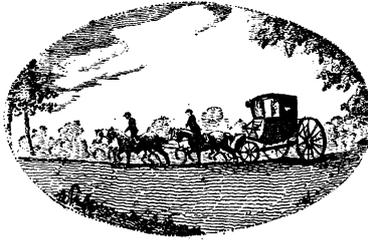
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CHAPTER I  
THE FIRST RAILWAYS



**Figure 2:** Heading to an eighteenth-century engraved Livery-Stable Trade Card

Up to the latter half of the eighteenth century roads in England had been incredibly bad. In the earlier part of the sixteenth century anything on wheels travelled along them with difficulty. The State did little to the roads, in many parts the Church alone ‘made smooth the way of the wanderer’. Riding was the normal mode of travel, and for those who could not ride there was the horse-litter, far preferable to the painful springless cart. It was only in 1598 that Stow remarks with astonishment that the world ‘runs on wheels’.

But this new travelling on wheels was at first neither fast nor easy. In 1658 the stage coach from London to Edinburgh took a fortnight, in 1669 there was a boast that you could go from London to Oxford between the rising and the setting of the sun. It is true that the first Turnpike Act was passed in 1633, but the Turnpike Roads and Toll Gates were not in general use till a hundred years later. There were those who opposed all travel except on horseback. ‘Stage coaches’, John Cresell writes in 1672, ‘effeminate His Majesty’s subjects who, having used themselves to travel in them, have neither attained skill themselves nor bred up their children to good horsemanship.’

The same writer suggests that coaches are bad for trade. Gentlemen and Ladies journey to London, buy all their clothes there, getting such a Habit of Jollity that nothing afterwards in the country will serve them. Besides not only are saddlers, etc., cast on the parish but clothes and hats are no longer spoiled by two or three journeys on horseback.

Early in 1622 the Water Poet [John Taylor] had expressed the same sentiments in more picturesque language.

Carroches, coaches, jades and Flanders mares,  
Do rob us of our shares, our wares, our fares;  
Against the ground we stand and knock our heeles,  
Whilst all our profit runs away on wheeles.  
And whosoever but observes and notes  
The great increase of coaches and of boates,  
Shall find their number more then e’er they were  
By halfe and more, within these thirty yeare;  
Then watermen at sea had service still,  
And those that stay’d at home had worke at will;  
Then upstart hel-cart coaches were to seek,  
A man could scarce see twenty in a weeke;

But now I think a man may dayly see  
More than the wherrys on the Thames can be.

It might have been some consolation to the Water Poet if he could have read that -

In 1703, when Prince George of Denmark went from Windsor to Petworth to meet Charles III of Spain, it appears that the journey, which is a distance of about forty miles, occupied fourteen hours, although those who travelled it did not get out, save when they were *overtuned* or stuck fast in the mire, until they reached their destination. 'We were thrown but once, indeed, in going', says the relator; 'but His Highness's body coach would have suffered very much if the nimble boors of Sussex had not frequently poised it, or supported it with their shoulders, from Godalming almost to Petworth, The last nine miles of the way cost us six hours to conquer them'.

Later coaches 'were known to have arrived in town from Birmingham early on the morning of the third day from that of their departure; and that on one occasion, when conveying intelligence to Government, a mounted jockey, by avoiding the high roads, and taking to the less knee-deep and sludgy fields, actually reached the capital on the second day, and earned a fame greater than any to be attained on the course'.

There was no doubt that until the close of the eighteenth century the Turnpike Trusts were badly managed. Adam Smith remarks in 1776 that a broad-wheeled wagon with two men and eight horses in six weeks carries and brings back four tons of goods between London and Edinburgh, while a ship with six or eight men between London and Leith would carry and bring back two hundred tons of goods in the same time. Water was still the recognised mode of transit for all heavy traffic.

It is not to be wondered at that canals became popular. If transit by sea with its uncertain weather was so practical, what a godsend it would be to move goods throughout the country on smooth water with a steady horse to depend on instead of the shifting wind. As early as 1661 Sir William Sandys obtained his Act for making the Wye and Lugg navigable and for cutting new channels, and from then till 1792, when speculation in canals was widespread, canals grew and grew in popularity. Many, including Josiah Wedgwood, openly condemned the existing road traffic, and supported vigorously a scheme for a network of canals throughout England. The construction of canals may be divided roughly into four periods. The first, concerned with the improvement of rivers, started in 1720. The second, which gave Manchester and Birmingham artificial access to the ports on the Mersey and Trent and Severn, began in 1761. The third, which coincided with the adoption of the steam engine and the opening of the iron industry, occupied the years 1790 to 1800, and the fourth and last commenced at the close of the Wars and concluded shortly after 1820. It was soon after this period that the railways showed signs of becoming serious rivals.

The first real canal in England, as opposed to the 'navigations' of former rivers, was that which joined the St. Helen's Coalfield to the Mersey in 1757, and for which Parliamentary power had been granted two years previously. But this was only a beginning, soon canals were to assume an importance that can scarcely be overestimated. Up to then rivers had been the natural highways, open to all; and what were canals but improved rivers? The *Quarterly Review* of 1825 showed that the canal was fifteen times as efficient as the turnpike road. When James Brindley was asked the use of rivers he answered 'undoubtedly to feed the navigable canals'. Even the making of them was of very considerable use, it employed thousands of navvies and relieved unrest and the want of work amongst the unskilled.