Ever-Increasing Circles?

Mobilities and travel in Devon in the 1920s

Contributors to the Devon in the 1920s project and Julia Neville[1]

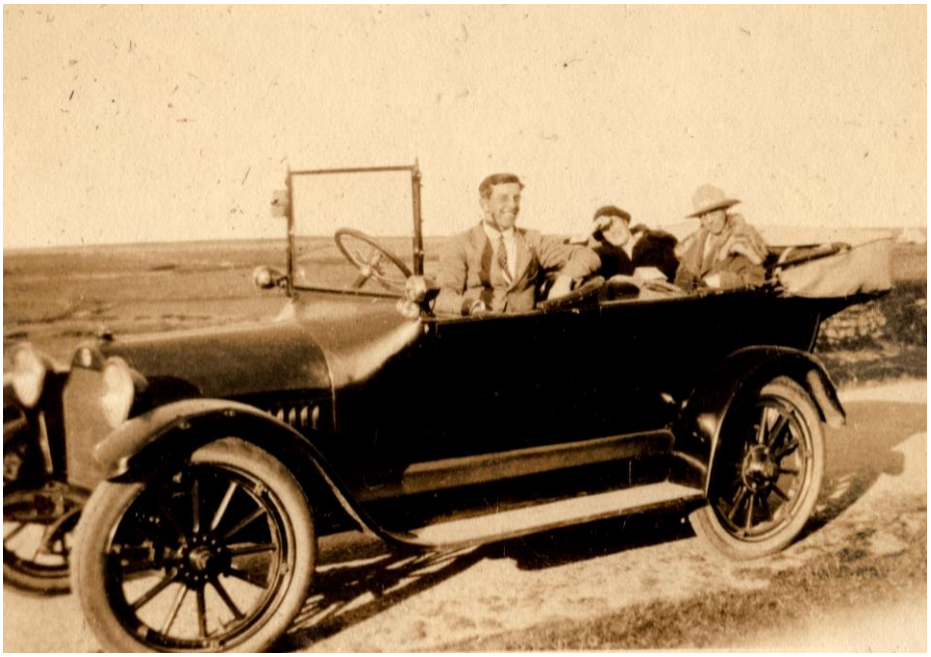

Figure 1: 'Charlie's Car.'[2]

Early in the Devon in the 1920s research project, Colin Divall, Professor Emeritus of Railway Studies at the University of York, came to speak to researchers and other interested parties at the symposium on Devon's Transport in the 1920s.[3] He urged researchers to keep a broad perspective on 'mobilities'. Although the 1920s was the decade when motor transport was expanding rapidly, this did not mean that pedestrianism, cycling, horse riding or driving, or indeed the railway, the electric tram, the steam traction engine or the boat were no longer important to everyday life. Divall urged the importance of understanding the interface between the evolution of transport and that of society more generally. He suggested it was important to explore both how people saw 'transport' at

[1] Individual contributors are acknowledged at the point in the essay when their information is quoted and are listed at the end of the essay.
[2] Photo by kind permission of Helen Shields.
[3] Colin Divall, 'Transport 1900–1939', published in Chris Wrigley (ed.), *A Companion to Early Twentieth-Century Britain* (Oxford Blackwell 2003), pp. 286–301.

the time and also how we, nowadays, see the trajectory of developments and their impact. He stressed the value of considering these issues at local level and testing out, for example, associations between growth in personal mobility and growth in other forms of consumption, and the tension between local authorities and independent operators in the provision of public transport. This challenge still remains to be met for Devon in the 1920s!. No volunteer attempted to take so broad a look at transport. On the other hand, almost all the project researchers allude to the impact of changes in mobilities for their topic, and many of those who supplied family histories demonstrated what was happening within their own small circles and this provides a range of valuable contributions to our understanding of how people 'got around'.. This essay attempts to bring together this plethora of references into a better understanding of the way in which patterns of mobility were changing in Devon in the 1920s. It references other thematic essays in the Devon in the 1920s collection and draws specifically on the contribution made to the project by family histories.[4]

The essay has not attempted to deal with the complementary topics of the impact of changing mobilities on the infrastructure of Devon's roads, the supply of fuel or, except by the occasional allusion, to working in the transport sector. Nor has it tried to tackle the local response to increasing national regulation in detail. These are important topics and deserve to be explored separately. The discussion that follows traces the evidence presented during the project by each form of mobility in turn. It starts with the most significant development of the 1920s, the popularisation of petrol-driven motor vehicles, and then considers in turn other forms of mobility, and how they changed in response to increasing motor traffic or other forces for change.

The 'motor': vehicles powered by internal combustion engines

Motor cars, motor lorries, motor vans and motorbikes had all been increasing in number on Devon's roads even before the First World War, and their use had accelerated to meet the needs of the wartime effort. Many men, and some women, learned to drive such vehicles during the war, and this opened up new opportunities. Olive Wharry, the Devon suffragette who had set fire to the tea rooms in Kew Gardens, is reputed to have gone into horticulture during the war and in the 1920s to have driven round Devon on a motorbike to sell strawberries from her greenhouse.[5] Henry Williamson

[4] The Devon in the 1920s research collection is to be archived by South West Heritage Trust and The Box, Plymouth. Individual essays are available to read online on the Devon History Society website, www.devonhistorysociety.org.uk/projects, under Devon in the 1920s.

[5] Personal communication from Olive Wharry's niece, Carolyn Daniel, to Devon Rural Archive, 2019.

rode down from London to Georgeham in North Devon to begin life anew after the war. The motorbike became a powerful symbol of emancipation in the 1920s.

Figure 2: Two boys, two motorbikes – and two girls on the pillions.[6]

The 1920s saw a dramatic increase in the numbers of motor vehicles. In 1921, 13,033 motor vehicle licences were issued by the Devon local taxation licences committee. By 1929, 71,128 were issued, a more than five-fold increase. Correspondingly, horse carriage licences had reduced from 11,813 to 3,920.[7] What had once been commonplace, the sight of a horse-drawn carriage in the street, now became remarkable. Jocelyn Foulkes (Hemming) remembered in Exeter almost as a curiosity:

> An old lady who used to be driven down from Cowick Hill above the river in her open carriage and pair (on a fine day) and wait outside the Stores. She wouldn't get out of the carriage but her groom would go in and fetch one of the shopkeepers to come out and take her order.[8]

The motor car opened up new opportunities for leisure not just to the well-off but, after the advent of the Ford Model T, to the comfortably off. The families who contributed their memories of motoring to the Devon in the 1920s project were families where the head of the household had a 'good job'. The Glovers in Keyham, whose head of household Charles Glover worked as a marine

[6] Photo by kind permission of Alick Lavers.
[7] Devon Heritage Centre, *Report of the Local Taxation Licences Committee, December 1929*, DCC/153/1/2. This does not cover the separate licensing authority areas of Exeter and Plymouth.
[8] Jocelyn Hemming, 'Exeter in the 1920s … as remembered', *Cadbury Compass* magazine, 2020, used with permission.

motor engineer, bought a car in the 1920s, and their family photo album shows some of the trips they made with it to Weir Quay on the Bere peninsula for bathing and camping out.[9] William Norris of Exmouth bought an Austin 7 at the 1926 Motor Show. Its number, YR 1465, was lovingly remembered by the family.[10]

Farming families bought cars. Sometimes this seemed to be primarily for leisure. Ruby, a little girl who grew up on a farm in Tawstock, remembered that her parents decided to buy one to replace the use of the horse and trap for their weekend outings to Barnstaple on Saturday nights to go dancing and on Sunday mornings to go to church.

> Ruby remembered the expedition into Barnstaple very clearly… She and her mother stood by the bridge and waited. Her father was given half an hour of instruction by the garage on how to drive and she remembered waving each time he drove by as he went around the centre of the town until he knew what he was doing. After just half an hour and absolutely no driving test of any form he was let loose with his black Ford to drive them all home.[11]

Tom Robins, on the other hand, who farmed his own land at South Lydcott Farm at High Bray in North Devon had a car driven out to the farm in March 1927 for him to try. He kept a diary about the working of the farm from 1908 to 1958, almost always in a Boots' Scribbling Diary.[12] In the memoranda section at the front of the 1927 diary he has made a careful note of what he was told by Mr Prideaux, the proprietor of a motor car agency in The Square, Barnstaple, who came out from Barnstaple to the farm with the Morris Cowley:

> Car – for Grease about 15 places in front and about 10 each side behind. Gear box front – back axle for oil – fan two greasers. Steering boss ½ gun full. Battery Cook's once a fortnight very important [and] Double of clutch doming from 3 to 2 and 2 to 1.

The car was brought out again the next day, and Tom drove Mr Prideaux back and returned on his own. After the weekend, Mr Prideaux came out daily for further lessons, including backing, and on the Friday Tom bought the Morris Cowley for £177 10s. Then on 5 April, a Mr Ellis arrived to put up a garage. Robins' car was sometimes used for leisure; he records an outing in the car to Saunton and Ilfracombe with his wife and children in May 1927, for example. It was used more often, or at

[9] Glover family history notes, contributed to the Devon in the 1920s project by Anne Hawkins.
[10] Norris family history notes, contributed to the Devon in the 1920s project by Marilyn Hambly.
[11] Staddon family history notes, contributed to the Devon in the 1920s project by Pam Morris.
[12] *Diaries of Tom Robins*, lent by Stuart Windsor to the Devon in the 1920s project.

least its use was recorded in his diary more often, for his farming business and public service appointments, such as attending the Diseases of Animals subcommittee of the Devon Agricultural Committee in Exeter or Farmers' Union meetings some distance away. He would sometimes drive a fellow farmer over, for example to Bridgwater, and be paid in gallons of petrol.

Even with the increase of licensed motor vehicles, they remained no more than an occasional sight in some villages, and even in some towns.

Figure 3: Broadhembury at the end of the 1920s (author's collection).

Donald Gould estimated that in Bampton in the mid 1920s only Mr Scott (the local quarry owner) and about six other people had cars. Mr Scott's was a Type T Ford, probably built at Ford's Trafford Park plant in Manchester.[13]

Motor vehicles transporting goods and produce

Agricultural produce

Motor tractors never became popular in Devon in the 1920s. Farmers had been unimpressed by tractor trials on the county's small steep fields during the First World War. The new agricultural college at Seale-Hayne tried again to interest farmers, providing Austin, Fordson and Sanderson at tractors trials in the autumn of 1920 and again the next spring. Farmers, it was said, discussed the

[13] Donald Gould, *Memories,* lent to the Devon in the 1920s project by Bampton Heritage Centre.

merits of the various types ‘keenly’, but that did not necessarily persuade them to buy. A further course was announced at Seale-Hayne, to be delivered by a member of staff plus ‘an expert from the Fordson Co’, in January 1925.[14] But it may never have taken place, as in January 1926 ‘an entirely new departure from the ordinary curriculum’ was announced, a short course in the running and management of tractors on the farm. Twenty-seven attended, either farmers’ or farmers’ sons, many of whom were already tractor owners.

Where petrol-driven vehicles did make a difference was in the transport of goods to and from the farm. Roger Tucker of East Prawle in South Devon described how his grandparents’ marketing and sales evolved during the 1920s.[15] His grandfather had driven a horse and cart to Dartmouth every Friday for the market, taking his own goods and acting as a carrier for other people.[16] After the First World War he bought a Ford, which he converted into a van, and later a Morris Commercial van.

Figure 4: William and Frances Tucker with their Morris Commercial van.[17]

[14] *Western Morning News*, 6 December 1920; 11 March 1921; 24 December 1924; 26 January 1926.
[15] Roger Tucker, ‘120 Years of Farming in Prawle’, talk given to the South Devon AONB on 23 February 2021 and subsequent conversation with Julia Neville. Further material available on the East Prawle History Society website, https://eastprawlehistorysociety.co.uk/farm-buildings. Accessed 20 June 2022.
[16] *Kelly’s Devonshire Directory 1919*, (Kelly’s Directories, 1919), p. 134.
[17] Photo, East Prawle History Society, https://eastprawlehistorysociety.co.uk/transport-general. Accessed 21 October 2023.

This new form of transport speeded up the journey from Prawle to Dartmouth. Instead of going once a week to the Friday market, the Tuckers took a shop there in 1921 for the produce of their farm: vegetables, pig meat (including hog's puddings) and rabbits.

The increasing use of motor vans and motor lorries put pressure on town market sites. Some town markets, such as that in Chulmleigh, had lost trade during the trend at the end of the nineteenth-century for markets to be set up at railway stations, in this case at Eggesford. The livestock markets in local towns came under pressure again once motor traffic increased. Wendy Buckingham-Arnold's essay on *Tiverton Market* shows the process in one Devon town. The market comprised both the pannier market – in use twice a week at the beginning of the 1920s – and the cattle market area, used fortnightly and for special sales such as the Devon Longhorn Rams sale. Most animals were still driven to market on foot by farmers and drovers, and indeed could cause trouble in the town streets if they tried to run off, frequently damaging shopfronts. By 1924, the market trustees recognised that the cattle market was in decline and most of the shows and fairs had moved to out-of-town sites. They proposed splitting the cattle and pannier market days to ease congestion for drovers and lorries. Although the market tolls were a third higher than in 1914, the money raised from cattle sales had declined by a quarter. In 1928 it was suggested the cattle market should be turned into a 'parking station'.[18]

Urban businesses

The impact of the growing reliability of road haulage can be seen on Exeter's business community along the waterfront beside the River Exe. The storage cellars on the quayside began to be leased as garages. When the city council commissioned revaluation of some of the commercial properties along the waterfront in 1927, several of the changes related to garages. In the twenty businesses inspected, the surveyor found that the South Devon Ice and Cold Storage Company had converted a stable to a garage (removing the partitions); Tremlett's Tannery had constructed a stone and slate garage for one lorry; and Gabriel and Wade the timber merchants still maintained a two-stall stable, but had also built a garage.[19]

At Exe Bridge, the City Brewery turned from the use of big shire horses pulling the drays, as Jocelyn Foulkes remembered them in Exeter in the 1920s, first to steam transport and then motor lorries. The workforce of the City Brewery at the time of the 1921 census contains two brewer's

[18] Wendy Buckingham-Arnold, *Tiverton Market,* in the Devon in the 1920s Research Collection.
[19] The Box, Plymouth, 1023-217, *Exeter Waterfront Rating Book*.

draymen, working with the horses, one steam lorry driver and one motor lorry driver, showing that these forms of transport co-existed, though the motor lorries were to supersede other forms of transport in the end.

Their collection of photographs provides a visual record of the changes.

Figure 5: Photographs of changing transport during the 1920s at the City Brewery, Exeter.[20]

Change from horses to steam wagons to motor lorries seems to have been a regular form of progress in the 1920s, whether by big firms or by individuals such as Thomas Griffin. Thomas Griffin was an Exeter haulage contractor and his progress through the different modes of transport is illustrated by the local newspapers, in which he appeared several times. In 1919 he owned a horse and van. The horse bolted along the main street. In 1922 he owned a Foden steam wagon and was prosecuted

[20] Photos by kind permission of the Brewery History Society, www.breweryhistory.com. Accessed 12 July 2024.

for driving without a rear light. By 1926 his motor lorry featured in the account of an episode of salmon poaching.[21]

Donald Gould describes the interim stage of steam lorries from his Bampton childhood:

> Scotts had five such lorries at this time followed by several more. There were no excavators or loading shovels at this time. As it was not convenient to move furniture by train this had to be done by horse wagon or by steam traction engine pulling two or three trailers which could travel to the final destination.[22]

In another family history in the project collection, however, the Northcotts, who moved from North Tamerton to Tedburn St Mary in 1919 were already using a motor lorry for their furniture removal.[23]

Motorisation arrived for vehicles in community services too. Although in 1920, Bideford's new fire engine was a steam-powered one, bought second hand from New Barnet council, they changed it for a motor fire engine in 1927.[24] In 1929 the vehicle bought for the smaller community of Topsham cost £1000 and consisted of a tender, carrying a 30ft escape, built on a Morris chassis and driven by a 15 hp engine. Named Aphrodite II, it was 'christened with Devonshire cyder' to inaugurate its service and presented to the parish council in May 1929.[25] Although the Exeter St John Ambulance brigade had acquired motor ambulances during the First World War, even at the end of 1924 Exmouth was only supplied with a 'hand ambulance'. As a result of a coroner's criticism about the delay in taking a patient to hospital at an inquest, the council was persuaded into buying its first motor vehicle in February 1925.[26]

This gulf between those who had or could learn the skills of driving a motor vehicle and those who could or did not was largely a generational one. Ann Paltridge, later Gaw, remembered how her father, an Okehampton builder, 'had a little lorry, but he never drove. He used to hire a man to drive

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[21] *Western Times*, 4 September 1919; 14 January 1922; *Devon and Exeter Gazette*, 9 July 1926.
[22] Donald Gould, *Donald's Memories.*
[23] Northcott family history notes, contributed to the project by Rosemary Horrell.
[24] *Charles Morris and Bideford Fire Brigade*, family history contributed to the Devon in the 1920s project by Charles Morris.
[25] *Devon and Exeter Gazette*, 6 May 1929, reference as part of the Bicknell family history collection, contributed to the Devon in the 1920s project by Kate Weedon.
[26] *Devon and Exeter Gazette*, 5 February 1925.

the lorry.'[27] Henry Williamson in Georgeham noted that: 'Nowadays the baker called every afternoon in a motor van' and that 'his father, after two attempts to drive the car, stayed at home.'[28]

The increase in motor vans and lorries led to a decline in traditional horse traffic from villages to their nearest urban centre. Statistics on livestock collected at parish level by the Board of Agriculture[29] show that the number of horses on farms in the county declined overall by almost a third between 1919 and 1929, in line with the decline nationally. The Poltimore Estate Research Society has identified that the decline in the numbers of horses in Poltimore village was not in the numbers of 'heavy horses', which remained fairly constant, but in the numbers of 'other' horses, e.g. saddle horses, 'vanners', who pulled the wagons, and horses for traps and carriages.[30] Nonetheless, in the most rural of areas the horse and its wagon remained central to the everyday life of the farmer. Ruby Staddon recalled that for her mother, who had no water in the farmhouse, the 'easiest' way to do the washing was:

> to load up the clothes on the horse and cart plus a copper to wash them in and go to the river on the farm. They lit a fire, boiled the water in the copper, scrubbed the clothes on a board and then rinsed them in the river water. Then everything was loaded back on the cart and taken back to be hung up.

The horse and cart were also used to collect seaweed from the beach for making laver bread. This, along with cream, butter and eggs, was all loaded into the cart on market day to be sold at the Barnstaple pannier market.

Pedestrianism

People who contributed their own histories to the project experienced the 1920s as their childhood. Walking was their natural way of getting around. Donald Gould remembered his childhood in Bampton: being sent out into the garden to pick the vegetables or the woodlands to pick up firewood; walking to church to sing in the choir on Sunday morning and stopping to deliver the Sunday joint for the baker to roast. His first job aged ten was to fetch the cattle in from pasture to

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[27] Ann Paltridge, later Ann Gaw, *Okehampton Oral History Archive*, Museum of Dartmoor Life.
[28] Henry Williamson, *Life in a Devon Village* (Faber & Faber, 1945), p. 20.
[29] The arrangements for recording and collecting the statistics are described by The National Archives, https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C10469. Accessed 18 August 2024.
[30] Poltimore Estate Research Society (2024), *Poltimore in the 1920s.* Twenty horses had been recorded in this category in 1919; by 1929 this had declined to seven.

milk before walking to school. Many everyday chores involved walking to fetch water from the standpipe or well, or milk, butter and cheese from the farm. Even in urban areas where public transport existed, Vera Full remembered that 'there was never any money for tram fares – we walked in all weathers.'

Pedestrianism was not merely a means to an end: it was part of everyday leisure activities. Vera, quoted above, explained that 'on Saturday evenings people went into [Plymouth] city centre and walked about in groups; we'd meet up with relatives.' A Sunday morning walk after church or chapel was a tradition, for example in Petrockstowe where Violet Bridgeman remembered that 'the young people took the opportunity to get together after church on Sunday when, dressed in their smartest, they would go for a walk', often along the road past Moor Mill to the station.[31] It could even become a lengthy exercise. Jim Crocker recalled that he and his father used to walk 'from Okehampton out to Sourton Cross… and turn … and come back around Melliford Moor … on the Holsworthy road, and that was the Sunday morning walk before lunch.'[32] Donald Gould also remembered the 'special evening exercise' of hare or hounds on foot, not on the lanes or the roads but cross country in the dusk – 'great fun but sometimes a bit scary'.[33]

As house building in the 1920s developed, new estates were located further and further from the urban centre, which was still where most people worked. Residents on the new estates grumbled about poor public transport. This sometimes led to pressure to improve public transport services at election times. George and Clara Daymond, councillors for one of Plymouth's outer wards, St Budeaux, were constant campaigners for improving connectivity by tram or bus to the centre.[34] Other councillors looked back to the time when a walk to work of more than five miles had been normal. The chair of Exeter's Housing Committee, referring in a housing debate in the early 1930s to the fact that it had been said that people could not walk [into the city centre] from the new Burnthouse Lane estate, commented 'Rubbish!' He knew the time when a man walked from Broadclyst to Exeter for his work. 'That was when men had legs.'

Walking was, however, still the way most people went to work. As Donald Gould remembered in Bampton, 'I would say 90% of the local people worked mainly on farms or in the local industry, quarrying, [or] in local shops.' His early morning mile's walk taking the cattle out to pasture meant

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[31] Violet Bridgeman, family history notes contributed to the Devon in the 1920s project by Brenda Powell.
[32] Jim Crocker, *Okehampton Oral History Archive,* Museum of Dartmoor Life.
[33] Donald Gould, *Donald's Memories.*
[34] *Western Morning News*, 10 October 1922; 19 October 1928.

passing three or four men on their way to work in the sawmills. Ivy Cox had the other side of the dairying chores. Aged ten, she delivered the milk around Lower Hooe with her fingers clutching about twelve cans 'up over Hexton Hill through Hooe village, over the stile at the top and down over the allotments' and up to Mrs Revell's house.[35]

Walking was not just a way of earning pocket-money for the young, but a part of a job. Reg Colley remembered the fisherman, George Cornish, bare legged from the knees down and barefoot, with a basket of fresh, cheap fish on each arm which he would sell up and down the village before sailing back to his home at Lympstone on the other side of the estuary.[36] Street traders, known as hawkers, pushed barrows or handcarts. Vera Full remembered the 'salt man' with a block of salt on a handcart under a canvas cover mounted over a hoop, and ex-servicemen playing accordions. Violet Jeffery, who worked at German's boot factory in Okehampton, was given a handcart to transport shoes for repair between the shop and the factory.[37]

For some, willing or unwilling, pedestrianism was a way of life. These were the 'tramps' or 'vagrants' as they were termed in official parlance. Their numbers increased dramatically in Devon during the decade after the First World War. The war had artificially suppressed numbers of able-bodied men who were out of work. In 1915 the number of admissions to the 'casual wards' of workhouses in Devon had been 22,329; in 1921 it had fallen to 8,244; then it rose abruptly in 1922 back to 22,752, and by 1927 had reached 52,915.[38] Many tried never to trouble the authorities, but the workhouses did provide overnight shelter, though with requirement for labour the following day. There were seventeen 'casual' wards in Devon workhouses and well-established tramping routes of between 14 and 20 miles between one and the next. May Sanders remembered the queue for workhouse admissions in Bideford:

> Men on the road; they were always known as 'tramping kiddies'...They would go from workhouse to workhouse, that's right. And afternoons, if you were out in Bideford, you'd see them congregate on the end of the bridge, on the end of Bideford bridge, until 4 o'clock, and then they'd all troop down to the police station to get a little ticket for the workhouse for the night … sometimes you'd have up to twenty at a time …[39]

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[35] Donald Gould, *Donald's Memories*; Robin Blythe-Lord, *Ivy's Story* (Camelot, 2003).
[36] Reg Colley, *Looking Back or My Memoirs*, 1980, Starcross Alan and Pauline Jarvis, p. 20, loaned to the Devon in the 1920s project by Starcross History Society.
[37] Vera Full family history notes contributed to the Devon in the 1920s project by Judy Davies; Violet Jeffery, *Okehampton Oral History Archive*, Museum of Dartmoor Life.
[38] *Western Morning News*, 4 June 1927, Devon Vagrancy Committee.
[39] Interview with May Sanders b. 21 January 1914, taped by Jacqueline Sarsby, 15 April 1986. The term 'tramping kiddy' seems to be connected with the archaic use of 'kiddy,' meaning man or boy, and sometimes 'low thief'.

As the speed and quantity of vehicular traffic increased, pedestrians became more vulnerable to accidents. Numerous accidents, particularly to the young and the very elderly, some of which were fatal, were reported in the newspapers. A hospital admission after an accident often generated a newspaper article, particularly when the local cottage hospital was involved. Examples include Henry Bonfield, age 86, who was struck on the right leg while walking up Station Road in Axminster, and Bessie Andrews, age 11, who was knocked down when in November 1924 she stepped out in front of a car in Fore Street, Exeter.[40]

In November 1929, the national Pedestrians' Association was founded, and a Devon branch, whose secretary was a T. Carter of Landscove, was recruiting in Devon later that month. His appeal, addressed particularly to 'those whose occupations or preferences cause them to use the roads on foot' stated that: 'Many serious accidents have occurred in the course of even so short an adventure as in crossing [the street] or alighting from trams and buses.'[41] The Pedestrians' Association's initial action was to lobby the Minister of Transport to object to the proposals to revise speed limits; and to press for the construction of footpaths as an integral part of developments receiving financial support from the Road Fund.[42]

The bicycle

For the first third of the twentieth century, single-speed 'safety' bicycles were a significant method of mobility for adults and young people. Three-speed bikes were being introduced, but Donald Gould remembered that: 'A bicycle without a three-speed cost about £3, and £1 more for three-speeds' and that a feature of the design at that period was a step for mounting, protruding from the axle of the back wheel, though he suggests that this was more often used by him and his teenage friends to accommodate a second person on the bike.[43]

For children, the 'fairy bicycle' or 'fairy bike', with smaller wheels, was introduced during the 1920s. Alan Parsons was given a 'fairy bicycle' when his family moved out from the city to Plymstock and spent weekends and holidays riding round the country lanes. Although riding a bike was associated chiefly with boys, girls did ride too. Vera Full in Plymouth desperately wanted a fairy cycle for Christmas and saved up her pennies in a Christmas club to secure it. Sadly, when

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[40] *Western Morning News*, 13 August 1927; *Devon and Exeter Gazette*, 22 November 1924.
[41] *Western Morning News*, 23 November 1929.
[42] *Western Morning News*, 11 December 1929.
[43] Donald Gould, *Donald's Memories.*

Christmas came, the Christmas club present was a doll and not a fairy cycle.[44] Ivy Cox used to ride out with her friend Edie, and Ivy was proud of the insurance payout she received when a car knocked her off her bike and she 'finished up in hospital with a broken ankle and concussion.'[45] In spite of the compensation, it sounds as though, as the girls were turning into the main road, they were the ones at fault. Cyclists, like pedestrians, needed to learn about road safety in the age of the motor vehicle.

Bicycles were used by many to get to work or to get from place to place for work. The Bishop of Exeter was perhaps Devon's most distinguished cyclist. As Jocelyn Foulkes remembered: 'the Bishop with his long white beard was a familiar sight riding round the city on his bicycle.' He rode in to his office in the Bishop's Palace regularly from his more comfortable home, Barton Place, out at Cowley.[46] William Garnham used his bicycle to get from his home in Poltimore to his place of work, the paper mills at Stoke Canon three miles away. He also used to cycle from the mills into Exeter after work to buy groceries before going home, placing his purchases in a bag attached to the handlebars.[47] Sometimes the bicycle was used for the first part of a commute to work. Reg Colley from Starcross remembered that: 'Young men and women would cycle down [to the station] from Kenton and district, leave their bikes at the back of Dr Iles' surgery across the road and catch the train. There was one at eight-twenty to Exeter to the shops where most of them worked.'[48] Doris Hambly's daughter in law remembered that Doris was in service as a daily in Exmouth; she cycled to and fro between there and her home in Littleham village, and recalled the experience of driving along a narrow lane on a dark winter evening with only a carbide lamp to light the way.[49]

Bicycles were also useful workhorses. Violet Jeffery (Parsons), mentioned above for using a handcart to take boots for mending up to the factory in Okehampton, was later lent a bike and used to ride between the factory and the shop with nailed boots hung round her shoulders and on the front of the bike.[50] Bill Pratt from Exton, where his family ran market gardens and a dairy, remembered taking milk in a can on his bike, and ladling the milk from the can into the customer's own jugs.[51]

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[44] Vera Full, family history notes, contributed to the Devon in the 1920s collection by Judy Davies.
[45] Robin Blythe-Lord, *Ivy's Story.*
[46] Jocelyn Hemming, 'Exeter in the 1920s'.
[47] *Devon and Exeter Gazette*, 11 March 1925.
[48] Reg Colley, *Looking Back at Starcross, Part Two – 1923–1983* (No publisher, 1983), p. 7.
[49] Hambly family history notes, contributed to the Devon in the 1920s project by Marilyn Hambly.
[50] Okehampton Oral History Archive, A08, by kind permission.
[51] Pratt family history notes, contributed to the Devon in the 1920s project by Eileen Pratt.

Figure 6: Fred and Sidney Lavers at Maristow.[52]

Bikes were used companionably for outings in pairs or in groups. Bill Gliddon, working away from home at a shop in Holsworthy, remembered that 'there was six or seven of us … there and everybody had a bicycle.… We used to cycle to Bude and Widemouth from Holsworthy … used to cycle around and maybe get home late at night.'[53] Gwen Stansfield (later White), a teenager in Exeter at the beginning of the 1920s, went to stay for her summer holidays in Paignton with her own family and the family of a school friend. Some of the party, including Gwen and her friend Betty, rode down on their bikes while others went by train and motor car, so as to have them available for the holiday. It took the cyclists four hours.[54]

Holiday resorts were careful to keep bikes for hire for those coming from longer distances. Huggins Brothers in Hartland kept almost 100 bikes for hire and, according to Stephen Hobbs, prioritised bicycle repair over motor repair.[55] Longer rides include that of the 'Bicycle Boys', two American students who travelled round England by bicycle in the summer of 1928. Their stops along the way, published on the Royal Horticultural Society website, included Bradfield House in Devon, the

[52] Photo by kind permission of Alick Lavers.
[53] Bill Gliddon, *Okehampton Oral History Archive,* Museum of Dartmoor Life.
[54] Guy and Richard Moore, eds, *Gwen White*, *An Exeter Perspective at the Dawn of the Twentieth Century, 1901–1922,* publication pending, pp. 248–49. Gwen White was the daughter of master carriage builder, Sebastian Moreton White, Sheriff of Exeter (1916–17), who donated the Sheriff's coach to the city.
[55] Stephen Hobbs, *Clovelly and Hartland in the 1920s*, essay in the Devon in the 1920s research collection.

furthest south they reached.[56] Tourists were warned, however, of some of the challenges of Devon's moorland roads for cyclists. On Exmoor there were 'difficult gradients to negotiate'. 'Inquiries', it is suggested, 'had better be made before attempting any cross-country cut through', but for those cyclists who dared, 'the grandeur of the scenery will amply repay him for the numerous hills he may have to walk'.[57]

Bicycles had an afterlife too, offering a different sort of mobility. Ralph Brown remembered the importance attached to what he called 'grids', made from bicycle frames without pedals or chains salvaged from the landfill tip at Lipson Creek and fitted with pram wheels and rags for a seat to ride around in.[58]

The railways

The railways were by the 1920s veteran operators in the transport of passengers and freight. Their development into a network of lines across the county (see illustration) had already affected traditional patterns of commerce, leading to the stagnation of market towns such as Chulmleigh and South Molton which the railways had bypassed. But the heyday of expansion had long gone and some projects, such as the extension of the line beyond Moretonhampstead to Chagford, were never completed. Passengers in Chagford were dependent on bus connections. The idea of the reopening of the Appledore and Westward Ho! line and the extension of the network west to Clovelly and Hartland, propounded by Captain Molesworth after the First World War, got as far as obtaining parliamentary approval, but was abandoned when it was recognised that motor bus and lorry transport would be more economical and adaptable.[59]

The multiple small companies set up in the Victorian era had already reduced by 1922 in Devon to the two major players, the Great Western Railway (GWR) and the London and South Western Railway (LSWR). Under the Railways (Grouping) Act 1921 these two companies became part of the 'big four' with LSWR renamed Southern Railways. The Lynton and Barnstaple railway and the Plymouth, Devonport and South West Joint Railway (from Bere Alston to Callington) had been the

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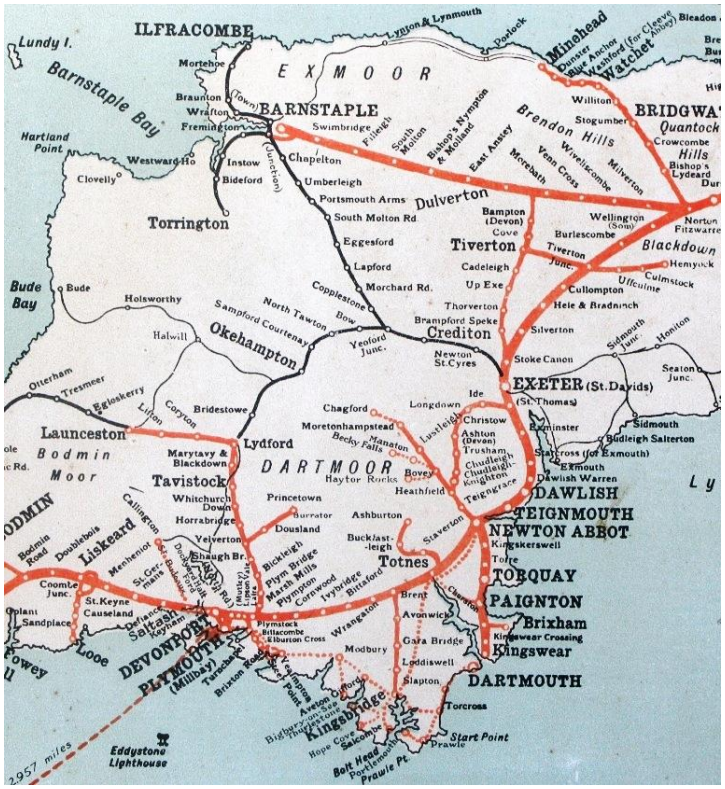
[56] *RHS*, 'The Bicycle Boys: An unforgettable Garden Tour', www.rhs.org.uk/digital-collections/the-bicycle-boys. Accessed 12 June 2023.
[57] [no author] *A Pictorial and Descriptive Guide to Minehead, Exmoor, Lynton & Lynmouth, Etc* (Ward Lock and Co., 1921).
[58] Ralph Marshall Brown, *Memoir*, Chapter 3, contributed to the Devon in the 1920s project by Jean Thompson.
[59] Stephen Hobbs, *Clovelly and Hartland in the 1920s,* Devon in the 1920s Research Collection.

only two small companies left in the county at the time, and they were absorbed into the Southern Railways.

The GWR enamelled map below shows the position at the time of the creation of the 'big four', with GWR lines in red and Southern lines in black.


ILFRACOMBE
Lundy I.
Barnstaple Bay
EXMOOR
BARNSTAPLE
Minehead
Watchet
Hartland Point
Westward Ho
Clovelly
Torrington
Instow
Bideford
Umberleigh
Portsmouth Arms
South Molton Rd.
Eggesford
Lapford
Morchard Rd.
Copplestone
Okehampton
Dulverton
Tiverton
Bude Bay
Bude
Holsworthy
Halwill
Launceston
Bodmin Moor
Lydford
DARTMOOR
Tavistock
Princetown
Horrabridge
Yelverton
Liskeard
Looe
Coombe Junc.
St.Keyne
Causeland
Sandplace
DEVONPORT
PLYMOUTH
(Millbay)
Totnes
Ashburton
Buckfast-leigh
Dousland
Bickleigh
Plym Bridge
Plympton
Modbury
Kingsbridge
Eddystone Lighthouse
Crediton
Newton St.Cyres
Thorverton
Brampford Speke
Silverton
Cadeleigh
Up Exe
Tiverton Junc.
Cullompton
Hele & Bradninch
Wellington (Som.)
Burlescombe
Bampton (Devon)
Cove
Williton
Stogumber
Brendon Hills
Wivelscombe
Milverton
Norton Fitzwarren
Blackdown
Culmstock
Honiton
Sidmouth Junc.
Seaton Junc.
EXETER (St.Davids)
(St.Thomas)
Ide
Longdown
Christow
Ashton (Devon)
Trusham
Chudleigh
Chudleigh Knighton
Heathfield
Teigngrace
Lustleigh
Exminster
Sidmouth
Budleigh Salterton
Starcross (for Exmouth)
Exmouth
Dawlish Warren
DAWLISH
TEIGNMOUTH
NEWTON ABBOT
Kingskerswell
Torre
TORQUAY
PAIGNTON
Brixham
Kingswear Crossing
Kingswear
DARTMOUTH
Torcross
Start Point
Prawle
Prawle Pt.
Bolt Head
Salcombe
Hope Cove
Thurlestone
Bigbury
Aveton Gifford
Modbury
Gara Bridge
Loddiswell
Slapton
Avonwick
Brent
Staverton
Ivybridge
Bittaford
Wrangaton
Cornwood
Plympton
Plym Bridge
Bickleigh
March Mills
Dousland
Burrator
Princetown
Whitchurch Down
Tavistock
Marytavy & Blackdown
Moretonhampstead
Becky Falls
Manaton
Haytor Rocks
Bovey
Chagford
Bridestowe
Lifton
Corryton
Egloskerry
Tresmeer
Otterham
Halwill
Sampford Courtenay
North Tawton
Bow
Yeoford Junc.
Copplestone
Morchard Rd.
Lapford
Eggesford
South Molton Rd.
Portsmouth Arms
Umberleigh
Chapelton
Bideford
Instow
Torrington
Clovelly
Westward Ho
Hartland Point
Bude
Bude Bay
Holsworthy
Launceston
Lydford
Tavistock
Okehampton
Crediton
Dulverton
Tiverton
Exeter
Barnstaple
Ilfracombe
Minehead
Watchet
Williton
Stogumber
Wellington
Burlescombe
Tiverton Junc.
Cullompton
Hele & Bradninch
Silverton
Stoke Canon
Newton St.Cyres
Thorverton
Brampford Speke
Cadeleigh
Up Exe
Culmstock
Honiton
Seaton Junc.
Sidmouth
Budleigh Salterton
Starcross (for Exmouth)
Exmouth
Dawlish Warren
Teignmouth
Newton Abbot
Torquay
Paignton
Brixham
Kingswear
Dartmouth
Totnes
Ashburton
Buckfastleigh
Dousland
Princetown
Tavistock
Lydford
Launceston
Bridestowe

alleviating unemployment. Its construction ran over time and overbudget, and by the time it was finally ready, the world had moved on. It was never well used: there were only three passenger trains a day. Violet Bridgeman, who lived in Petrockstowe, remembered that even after the line opened it was rare for villagers to use it to go to Bideford, or even to Torrington.[62]

Throughout the 1920s the most significant development of the railways was their increased use for tourism, encouraging holidaymakers and day trippers to the county. On 19 July 1926 the Southern Railways ran the first 'Atlantic Coast' express service, leaving Waterloo for Plymouth and dividing carriages along the route for different seaside resorts, including in Devon a portion for Sidmouth and Exmouth, a portion for Plymouth and a final portion for Torrington and Ilfracombe. It took over five hours to reach Ilfracombe. Even then the station was set up above the town, and travellers needed a motor bus or taxi to reach their final destination. Lynton station in North Devon lay similarly away from the town centre, but here the urban district council, acknowledging the importance of tourism to their community, did build a new road in 1921 with a gentler gradient to ease the final section of the journey down Sinai Hill to the town centre.

The 1920s were the heyday of long-distance railway travel to the West Country. As car ownership grew, the flexibility of motor travel was to draw visitors away from the railway to the road. There were still some families who could afford to take their car on the train for use at the other end. Alick Lavers, whose family were chauffeurs to the Lopes family at Maristow, noted that the family would be driven to London, then catch the train to Scotland for the shooting on their Sutherland estate, with the car transported on a special truck.[63] One of the Yealmpton U3A group discussing Devon in the 1920s recalled how cars of the visitors coming down for the yachting would be unloaded at Yealmpton station. However, in spite of the efforts of railway companies and local authorities to promote rail travel as part of the tourist trade, by the end of the decade, as Michael Blower points out in his study of tourism in Ilfracombe, passenger numbers were on the decline. Southern Railways records show that passenger tickets issued for Ilfracombe fell by one-third, from 69,218 in 1928 to 46,245 in 1930, and continued falling thereafter.[64]

Railways still played a large part in everyday life throughout the 1920s, for journeys to school or to work, and for the transport of goods. Once Donald Gould left his primary school in Bampton for a

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[62] Violet Bridgeman, family history, contributed to the Devon in the 1920s project by Brenda Powell.
[63] Lavers family history, contributed to the Devon in the 1920s project by Alick Lavers.
[64] Michael Blower, *Ilfracombe and the Elements of Tourism during the 1920s*, essay in the Devon in the 1920s research collection, quoting J. Nicholas, *The Ilfracombe Line,* (Irwell Press, 1998), p. 44.

senior school in Tiverton, he had to give up his early morning job taking the cows to be milked in order to be on time to catch the train for school. He took on a paper round instead, and recalled that 'the train guard kept the train standing when other boys gave the warning that I was approaching fast'.[65] He also managed to use his school season ticket to go into Tiverton for the family shopping on a Saturday. Sometimes journeys to school could be more complicated. Derek Lavers who lived at Huckworthy Bridge and went to school in Tavistock had to cycle a mile uphill all the way to Dousland railway station, catch a train for Yelverton and then at Yelverton change to the Tavistock line.

Barbara Cole from Princetown, whose older sisters had married and moved to Plymouth, remembered they were 'always' going down to visit them by train, particularly on Saturdays when there was cheap travel – 1s 3d for her mum and 7½ d for her – 'out on the 10.30 train and back on the 9 o'clock'. The journey involved changing at Yelverton and (like Derek Lavers) walking over the bridge there to the Tavistock line.[66] Children frequently travelled by train on their own. Ralph Brown and a group of boys from the new Mount Gold estate in Plymouth would be sent off in the summer for the day. They took the ironically named 'Turnchapel Express' from Lucas Terrace Halt to Turnchapel, where they could walk a further two miles to Bovisand beach. They had no timetable and no means of telling the time, so sometimes they had a long wait at the station for the train home.[67]

Longer journeys feature less frequently in the everyday experiences of Devon residents, but the increasing competition between coach and rail services was noted by Ralph Brown who recalled that when the family went to visit his father's original North Cornwall home from Plymouth they sometimes went by bus and sometimes by train, 'whichever was the cheaper'.[68] Railway staff had greater opportunities. Vera Full's dad worked for GWR, and that meant on one occasion he could use his 'privilege pass' for free to travel to Crewe and back, though not for the onward journey to Glasgow, which was not operated by GWR.[69]

The other area in which the railways played a significant part was in the transport of goods. William Chown, who farmed at Shillingford, just outside Bampton, used the railway for transporting

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[65] Donald Gould, *Donald's Memories.*
[66] Barbara Cole, family history contributed to the Devon in the 1920s project, recorded by Debbie Watson.
[67] Ralph Marshall Brown, *Memoir*.
[68] Ralph Marshall Brown, *Memoir*.
[69] Vera Full, family history.

specialist feed, or builders' materials for whatever his current project happened to be. These were usually delivered to Venn Cross on the main line to Barnstaple rather than to Bampton itself, which was only on a branch line. Unloaded for him at the station would be sheets of corrugated galvanised iron, gutters, downpipes, rolls of fencing, agricultural supplies and even cabbage plants, when he was trying out a new non-local supplier.[70] Unless, like the Pratt's nurseries at Exton, recalled by Eileen Pratt, you had a private siding off the railway line,[71] there was always an onward journey from a railway station to the final destination for the goods, or to the passenger's home, and the railways often employed their own staff to drive the horse-drawn vehicles or later the motor lorries and motor buses to do that. Bill Gliddon in Okehampton remembered 'course they 'ad a bus always outside the Plume of Feathers... that took you to the station, met every train and delivered all the people up to the Station Road and picked 'em up, brought 'em down...'[72]

As the 1920s went on, many lines no longer paid their way, if indeed they ever had, as many small rural branch lines were subsidised by other more profitable routes. This policy came into question as passenger and freight traffic both reduced. The closure of the branch line from Plymstock to Yealmpton to passenger traffic was announced in 1928 by a public notice, which also asked for suggestions for increasing the revenue, but when none were forthcoming the line did indeed close to passengers in July 1930.[73]

Other forms of public transport

Horse-drawn transport

Devon's principal towns had sprawled out well beyond their original boundaries by the 1920s, and residents in the suburbs looked for better connections with the centre than the old horse cab service could provide, though the horse cab did survive, just, into the 1930s. Martin McDonagh shows that the peak of the horse cab trade in Exeter had been in 1904 and that during the 1920s the numbers of motor taxi drivers overtook those of horse cab drivers.[74]

By 1932 all but one of the horse cabs were gone. Jocelyn Foulkes (later Hemming) remembered from her childhood in the 1920s that close to their home in Barnfield Crescent

[70] Bampton Heritage Centre, *William Chown Farm Papers*, transcribed for the Devon in the 1920s project.
[71] Eileen Pratt, family history contributed to the Devon in the 1920s project.
[72] Bill Gliddon, Okehampton oral history archive.
[73] Brian Moseley, *Encyclopaedia of Plymouth History*, www.plymouthdata.info/Railways-GWR%20Yealmpton%20Branch. Accessed 23 July 2023.
[74] Martin McDonagh, *The Horse Cab Trade in Exeter, 1820–1930* (Published by the author, 2020), p. 3.

> … was a cab stand with an old cabbie and his probably quite old horse. They never seemed to go anywhere and the horse had his head permanently in a nosebag, munching, while the cabbie smoked his pipe… The cab horse always got a pat when we went past which was quite often, and sometimes a lump of sugar as well.

This was probably Fred Lay, noted as still working from Southernhay in 1932. In an interview that year he was noted as the only remaining horse cab driver, and told a journalist that he would never change to a motor taxi. 'There is nothing like a horse.'[75]

The electric tram

One alternative to the horse cab, and indeed to the motor taxi, was the electric tram service, which ran to a regular timetable. These tramcars, running on fixed rails and powered by overhead wires, had been introduced in Exeter, Plymouth and Torquay before the First World War.

The Plymouth service was the most extensive of the three, covering 17 miles linking the older parts of the three towns of Devonport, Plymouth and Stonehouse out to the new suburb of St Budeaux, built for the dockyard workers. By 1922 the original small enterprises had all been united into a single network under the control of the town council, known as Plymouth Corporation Tramways. The operating system – under which at the terminus the conductor went up onto the top deck (almost all Devon trams were double-deckers), unhooked the cable connector with a long pole and moved it from one end to the other – was a source of fascination to children like Ralph Brown who regularly watched it at the terminus at Beaumont Road.[76] Competition from the tramways services led to the introduction by both GWR and LSWR of rail motor services (a coach with its own motor unit) to many of the minor stations on the Greater Plymouth network, covering the routes Friary to St Budeaux and Yealmpton and Saltash.

Richard Pengelly from Peverell in Plymouth recalled that they always used the tram when they went out for shopping, whether just down to Mutley Plain or into town for their weekly visit to the central market.[77] Margaret Fitsell remembered her maternal grandfather was responsible at the beginning of the twentieth century for seeing the trams ran smoothly, having a little booth at Derry's clock.[78] The tramways were used by groups as well as families. The children from the

[75] Jocelyn Hemming, 'Exeter in the 1920s'; Martin McDonagh, ibid.
[76] Ralph Brown, *Memoir*, Chapter 3.
[77] Richard Pengelly, family history contributed to the Devon in the 1920s research collection.
[78] John Maddock, died 1921, noted in the Maddock and Huxham family history, contributed to the Devon in the 1920s research collection by Margaret Fitsell.

Scattered Homes run by the Plymouth Guardians under the Poor Law were sometimes taken on them for a treat. A tram trip from the Guildhall Square out to Saltash Passage, then a stop on the return journey for tea at Pounds House and finally back to the Guildhall Square, was reported in 1923.[79]

The Torquay Tramways system ran from St Marychurch at one end to Paignton at the other, stretching for over nine miles, operating both single- and double-deck tramcars. *Kelly's Directory* for 1923 states that 'electric tramways connect Babbacombe, St Mary Church, Tor, Torquay Station and Paignton'.[80] Gwen White's month by the sea at Paignton in August 1920 included going to Torquay on the tram to play tennis. Paignton, she remembered, was the terminus, and here the conductor alighted, undid the rope and swung the pole off the overhead wire and turned it to face the other way.[81]

Hotels and boarding houses advertised their locations with reference to the trams, even if the service was actually quite distant: the Hotel Tembani, in 1928, stated that it was 'within 10 minutes of the trams'.[82] The opening of Paignton Zoo (Primley Zoological Gardens) in 1923 was marked by an invitation to Torquay Tramway Company employees to look round, presumably regarding them as being able to drum up new custom among their passengers.[83]

The popularity of the tram service in 1920s Exeter, even though it had only just over 5 miles of track, increased, as Martin McDonagh shows in Figure 8.

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[79] *Western Morning News*, 23 August 1923.
[80] *Kelly's Directory of Devonshire, 1923*, (Kelly's Directories Limited, 1923), p. 740.
[81] Guy and Richard Moore (eds), *Gwen White, An Exeter Perspective at the Dawn of the Twentieth Century, 1901–1922* (publication pending), pp. 248–49. Gwen White was the daughter of master carriage builder, Sebastian Moreton White, Sheriff of Exeter (1916–17), who donated the Sheriff's coach to the city.
[82] Reference to *1928 Torquay Guide* contributed by Alan Henshaw.
[83] *Torquay Times,* 5 July 1923.

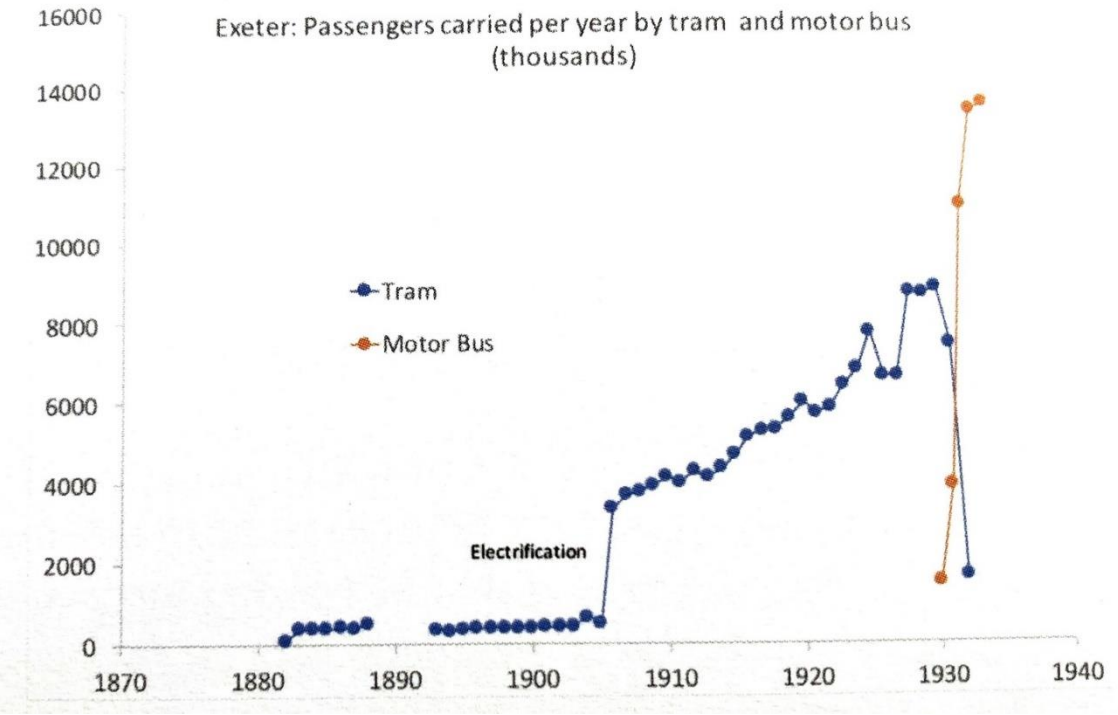

Figure 8: Rise in passenger traffic by tram in Exeter, 1905–30.[84]

Houses in suburban Heavitree were advertised as 'two minutes walk from the tram terminus' or 'within five minutes of trams,'[85] and the city council placed their new council housing estates within easy reach of the tram termini. Yet it was the Exeter tram service that was the first to close. Congestion in the High Street where there was insufficient width for two parallel tracks meant that trams had to wait for the single track to clear, thus holding up other traffic. By 1928 the delays were intolerable and the council decided to scrap the trams in favour of motor buses. The final tram ran in 1931.[86]

Motor bus services

Urban public transport was provided in other towns and on the periphery of the three largest by a network of bus companies. Alan Parsons remembered how he used this 'modern' means of transport to his school. He also remembered (as the family had no private car) how he went on the bus to a Christmas party in fancy dress as a 'Shell Petrol Pump', imagining that other passengers were looking and laughing at him.[87]

[84] Martin McDonagh, *The Horse Cab Trade in Exeter*.
[85] *Devon and Exeter Gazette*, 26 August 1921; 22 August 1924.
[86] Julia Neville, *Exeter and the Trams, 1882–1931,* (Exeter Civic Society 2010).
[87] Alan Parsons, family history contributed to the Devon in the 1920s collection by Val Bachelor.

Setting up a motor bus service was a significant opportunity for entrepreneurs in the 1920s. Ivy Cox remembered the plans to establish bus services between Plymouth and Hooe. Two companies were interested: Eddystone Buses and the Palace Saloon. A friend of theirs drove the Eddystone, so she took round a petition for him to get people to sign in its support. In fact, both operators were licensed. 'The Eddystone colours were blue and white, and the Palace Saloon was plum purple. It had a little blonde clippie who had a very smart uniform.'[88]

The purchase of a motor bus was a natural development for family firms previously involved in private hire work with horse cabs and early motor taxis. Three firms in Hartland in 1920 offered both motor car or omnibus transport, with both private hire and regularly timetabled journeys.[89] Mr Palmer ran the pub in Bratton Clovelly. His niece remembered that he bought a Ford Tourer from Day's in Okehampton for £125, 'just after the war'. He used to 'go to and from the station, and he'd go to Northlew and pick up people, and Lewdown for different functions. He had quite a big trade until someone else started up.'[90]

A detailed description of the evolution of a local bus service between Newton Abbot and Widecombe, the Tor Bus, was contributed to the project by Muriel Potter (Bunclark), the daughter of one of its founders, and has also been written about by Roger Grimley.[91] John and Mary Potter had built up a business with horse-drawn wagons taking people from the Liverton area to Newton Abbot, their local market town and major railway station. Demand for transport increased in the early 1920s, not merely for shopping but for transport for the products of the new pottery at Liverton. The Potters' two sons bought a motor lorry, fitted it out with seats, and began to operate a regular service. Various routes were tried out in response to local demands, but the service finally settled on running through Ilsington. Competition from other companies dropped away, and in 1926 the brothers went to a motor show, saw a Doidge chassis fitted with a purpose-built fourteen-seater bus body, and bought it. Another followed a year later and new garaging had to be arranged. The two buses provided a service three times daily, with extras on Wednesdays and Saturdays and a reduced Sunday afternoon service between Newton Abbot and Haytor, including the steep incline on the slope of Dartmoor up from Liverton. By 1928 the service was extended to Widecombe. The base for the buses moved up to Tor Garage close to Haytor.

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[88] Robin Blythe-Lord, *Ivy's Story*.
[89] Stephen Hobbs, *Clovelly and Hartland in the 1920s*, in the Devon in the 1920s research collection.
[90] Dorothy Lintern, *Okehampton oral history archive*, Museum of Dartmoor Life.
[91] Muriel Bunclark, family history contributed to the Devon in the 1920s collection; Roger Grimley, *Tor Bus Remembered* (publisher as author, 1994).

Figure 9: The Tor Bus service in Liverton in the 1920s.[92]

Families in other villages became known for their bus services, such as Down's of Mary Tavy. Edwin and Emma Down were an early beneficiary of Devon County Council's contracts for school transport, introduced in recognition of the very long distances some children needed to walk, especially as smaller rural schools were closed. Their contract in 1927 was 14 shillings per day.[93]

Even when bus services were introduced they did not necessarily take custom from the railway. Reg Colley remembered that the introduction of bus services in 1922 by Devon General to Starcross 'did not cotton on for a long time.' Though the fares on Devon General from Starcross to Exeter were cheap – 4s 6d for a weekly ticket –the stopping train service between Newton Abbot and Exeter was so frequent.[94]

Not everyone approved of the extra freedom offered to young people in the villages by the development of scheduled motor bus services. Indeed it became the subject of some censorious conversations amongst groups concerned with the 'moral welfare' of the young. Mrs Payne-Cook from Northam addressed the Diocesan Committee for Preventive and Rescue Work in 1928 on the

[92] Photo by kind permission of Roger Grimley.
[93] *Devon County Council*, 'End of an era – coach operator calls it a day after celebrating incredible school transport milestone', 17 October 2023. www.devon.gov.uk/news/end-of-an-era-coach-operator-calls-it-a-day-after-celebrating-incredible-school-transport-milestone. Accessed 19 November 2024.
[94] Reg Colley, *Looking Back at Starcross Part Two, 1923–1983*, p. 7.

subject of ‘Special Moral Difficulties of the Country Villages’. One of the areas she emphasised was the problem of the motor bus:

> The motor bus took boys and girls to the cinemas and the dances in the towns, and often they returned, over-excited and over-tired along lonely country lanes. The effect of the dancing, the sort of pictures they saw, and the effect of the music – often bad music – on slow mentalities must be taken into account. Efforts must be made to organise recreation, mixed clubs, old-fashioned dances and music.[95]

Group travel for leisure activities

As well as providing scheduled services between villages, buses and charabancs grew in popularity in Devon as the transport of choice to visit local attractions. The services might be aimed particularly at holidaymakers, but they were also booked by local organisations, communities, businesses or other associations for outing for their members to the moors or the seaside.

Robert Crawley dates the explosion in charabanc service to the immediate aftermath of the First World War. He says:

> Petrol driven chassis, sometimes refurbished WW1 army lorries, were available fairly cheaply and once fitted with a crude charabanc body could be used during the summer and in winter have the lorry body substituted to keep the owner otherwise employed. It is of no surprise, that in 1919 there were just four enterprising operators on the road which in 1920 had shot up to sixteen.

In 1920 there were thirty-one such vehicles in operation in Torquay and Paignton, twelve registered as sole vehicles, three owned by Gills, four owned by Gully, four by Hutt and eight by Grist. Similarly, Anne Corry assesses that in Plymouth services were operated by Yellow Cars; Tan Cars (the Embankment Motor Company) to Torquay, Bude and Newquay; and Violet Charabancs, offering journeys from Drake Circus to the Cheesewring, or Slapton Sands. A popular expedition for visitors to Torquay (promoted by company advertising) was a visit to the Watcombe and Longpark potteries where, of course, holiday souvenirs could be purchased.[96]

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[95] *Devon and Exeter Gazette*, 21 November 1928.

[96] John Bowden, *Torquay Pottery in the 1920s*, essay in the 1920s research collection, referencing (a) Virgina Brisco, *Torquay Commemorative and Advertising Wares;* and (b) No author name, ‘Visit the Potteries with the Devon General Omnibus & Touring Co.’, *Scandy, The Magazine of the Torquay Pottery Collectors’ Society*, 151 (Spring 2014), p. 35. Note: this article was written by Margaret Sloman. Personal communication (Andy Violet, email to John Bowden, 26 April 2024).

There are numerous accounts of local organisations making arrangements for charabanc parties. As an example, Figure 10 shows a row of charabancs lined up in Newton St Cyres for the Sunday School outing in July 1924.

Figure 10: Charabancs ready to depart from Newton St Cyres, 1924.[97]

The buses drove over Haldon Moor down to Teignmouth for lunch, boating and other amusements, followed by a 'splendid tea' at Jervis Café. Then it was back via Dawlish, where another two-hour stop was made, and home through Starcross, Exminster and Alphington. Buns, oranges and sweets were handed round and home was reached at half past nine.[98]

The same page of the newspaper gives a picture of the range of outings taking place in any one week in the summer. It reports outings by Ashburton Field Club to Buckland Beacon; by Crediton Women's Liberal Association to Barnstaple, Ilfracombe, Lynton and Lynmouth; by a party from Gittisham to visit HMS Warspite in the bay at Seaton; by Moretonhampstead Conservative Women's Association to Minehead; by Shobrooke Girl Guides to Torquay and Paignton with tea at Deller's café; and by the Silverton Women's Institute to Cheddar and Weston-super-Mare. But the charabanc companies did not have a monopoly on group travel.

Also in the newspaper report are two separate trips by train to Wembley Stadium, where the British Empire exhibition was taking place. Nearly one hundred people from Colyton, including Boys'

[97] Photo supplied by Newton St Cyres History Group from the postcard collection of Tim Sedgwick.
[98] *Western Times*, 4 July 1924.

Club members, went by train to the exhibition and forty members of Exmouth Choral Society went to sing in a mass performance of Handel's choruses in the stadium. They returned to Exmouth the same night.

Coastal and estuarine traffic

Devon's two coasts, indented with river estuaries and studded with ports and harbours, had always meant that travel or trade by boat or ship was a part of everyday life. As with road traffic, the source of power evolved from the efforts of rowers and the winds in the sails to steam-driven and then petrol-driven engines. Boats powered with engines were less vulnerable to weather conditions, although they could be affected by strikes or shortages of fuel supplies. The focus for this section is on personal mobilities and trade rather than on fishing or boat-building.

Plymouth was, of course, the port that handled most naval and international shipping. Though other ports like Brixham and Dartmouth took some traffic, this was the heyday of the transatlantic liner, calling in at Plymouth before steaming up the channel to London to drop off passengers and mail to progress more swiftly by rail to their destinations. The GWR owned the docks in Plymouth that facilitated this interchange.

More significant for more Devonians, however, were the ferry services. There were public ferries, for goods and passengers, across the Tamar, the Plym, the Yealm, the Kingsbridge-Salcombe estuary, the Dart, the Teign and the Exe along the south coast, across Torbay and, on the north coast, across the Torridge. Some were basic, such as the Appledore-Instow or the Salcombe estuary ferries, operating on a hail-and-ride basis, but others were substantial.

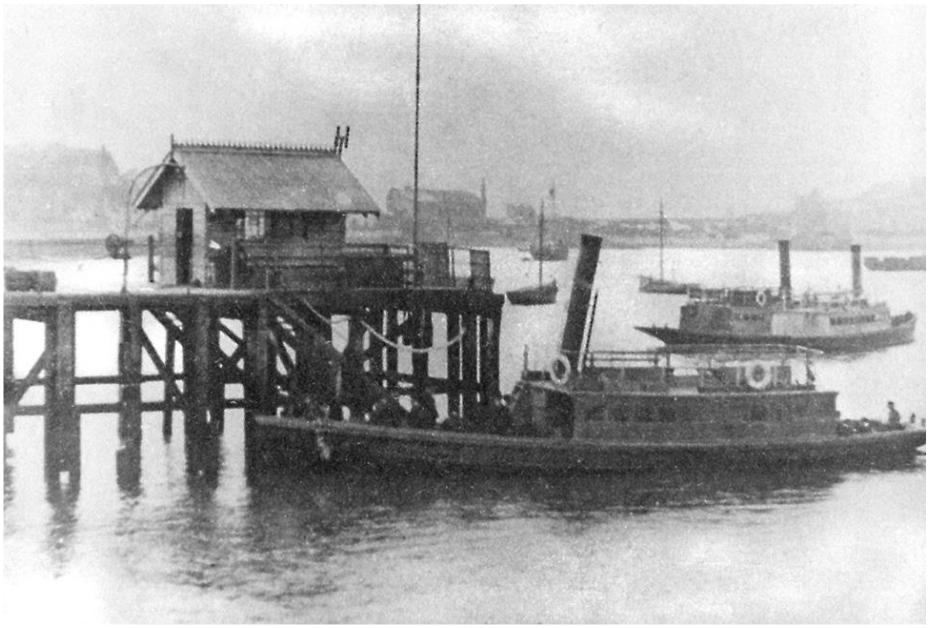

Figure 11: Turnchapel and Oreston Ferry at Turnchapel Pier[99]

Ivy Cox recalled going with her father, a retired naval warrant officer, from Hooe to Devonport to collect his pension. They took the Turnchapel and Oreston Ferry to Phoenix Wharf on the Barbican and walked on to Devonport.

Reg Colley from Starcross provides a picture of the ferry that plied across the River Exe between Starcross and the Exmouth docks:

> The ferry has left Exmouth docks, you can see the smoke coming out of the chimney... It is the Zula this morning, with Alf Pearce, the skipper, and Fred Gronburg looking after the steam. After he has tied her up and made her secure the first passengers come off … Billy Diaper is on the end with two three-wheeled barrows loaded sky high with parcels, wallpaper etc to be distributed to the shops at Exmouth. The porters along with the skipper form a chain, and the parcels etc are stacked aboard, together with the odd bike and pram.[100]

The smaller ferries, however, experienced a decline in traffic during the 1920s: the Kitley ferry on the Yealm closed in 1929 when the railway withdrew the combined rail/ferry ticket.[101]

However, there were plenty of small boats still on the rivers and waterways, used for getting from place to place and going ashore and back from boats moored in deeper water. Children learned to

[99] Robin Blythe-Lord, *Ivy's Story*.
[100] Reg Colley, *Looking Back at Starcross, Part Two, 1923–1983,* p. 19.
[101] George Hodge and the Kitley Ferries', *Spirit of the Yealm collection*, https://ryda.org.uk/the-spirit-of-the-yealm/george-hodge-and-the-kitley-ferries. Accessed 2 December 2023.

row at a young age. Ralph Brown remembered taking jam jars back to the Co-op in Plymouth to earn halfpence and pennies to save up to hire a boat from a local boatyard with a mate and 'flounder' about on the river.[102] Ivy Cox had a friend with a rowing boat and the pair of them used to row out to the coal barges moored at Turnchapel and catch the fish that lurked beneath the barges.[103] Boats were increasingly maintained for pleasure rather than to do the everyday chores. The range of classes in summer regattas shows the popularity of rowing: not, perhaps, in the best known, the 'Royal Regattas', but in the more local where 'regatta' might be part of a local sports day including track and field sports and swimming. On the Plym and Tamar estuaries alone during July and August 1925, in addition to the Plymouth Royal Regatta, there were regattas at Saltash, Torpoint, Mutton Cove, Stonehouse, Kingsand and Cawsand, Barbican, Cattedown, Laira, and Turnchapel and Oreston.

The use of boats by holidaymakers for fishing and cruising was already well established. Freda Hambly's father and father-in-law, ex-naval men, found employment after retirement on the two Exmouth paddle-steamers, SS Duke of Devonshire and SS Duchess of Devonshire.[104] But this trade was not easy to expand. The Three Towns Steamship Company bought a new motor passenger launch in 1923 for trips up the Tamar to Weir Quay or round the coast to the Yealm. It offered both passenger trips and transport for goods and packages, but in 1928 the company was forced to close. The manager blamed motor traffic:

> We used to have a very good connection with Calstock but as soon as motor traffic began to boom people began to send their goods by motor; it did not cost them any more and had only to be handled once or twice as against four times if it was sent by steamer.[105]

In the air

Civil aviation was still in its infancy in the 1920s, with a civil aviation station under discussion in Plymouth and one operational at Haldon. These were used by private aircraft and did not offer scheduled routes. However, aviation was already well established in the armed forces, and Devon family histories show us that for young technically minded boys the RAF provided excellent career opportunities. William Tibbs was accepted as a cadet at the RAF Cranwell No 3 School of Technical Training in 1921, passing out as Aircraftman 2nd Class in 1925. In 1926 he went to

[102] Ralph Brown, *Memoir,* Chapter 3.
[103] Robin Blythe-Lord, *Ivy's Story.*
[104] Freda Hambly's *Memoirs*.
[105] *Western Morning News*, 19 May 1923.

India.[106] A few years later, in 1924, Donald Gould joined the RAF because 'he could see no future in Bampton'. Within a year he was in Palestine.[107] The British Empire was at its greatest extent, and bright young men could make a career in upholding its defence.

Conclusion

Colin Divall proposed that the project researchers should seek to link the evolution of transport with that of society more generally. It is evident from the discussion above that, like the rest of the country, the disruptor to established patterns of mobility in Devon in the 1920s was the petrol-driven vehicle in all its forms: motorbike, motor car, motor van, motor lorry and motor bus. Businesses saw the advantage of the greater flexibility of the motor vehicle, and traditional methods of transport – whether by horse, which was less speedy, or by water or rail, which usually involved additional unloading and reloading goods for the first and last miles of the journey – began to reduce in significance. The motorbike and motor car, as well as contributing to improved business efficiency, made access possible to a wider range of leisure activities for those who could afford the initial outlay on and upkeep of these vehicles. Devon's residents benefited from the additional opportunities in the hospitality sector created by the greater numbers of visitors and holidaymakers. The village bus improved connectivity between villages and towns, speeding up the journeys for those going to market, taking children longer distances to the new secondary schools, and providing the opportunity for country people to visit the cinema or the dance hall in the nearest town for entertainment. These opportunities had already been available to people in Devon's larger towns before the war, but by the end of the 1920s they were available to many village dwellers too. Yet Devon remained a county with a multitude of villages and hamlets, not all of which had public transport by the end of the 1920s. For many people, although the baker or the builder might call in a motor vehicle, their personal mobility would have been, like those of an earlier generation, limited to what they could access on foot or by bike.

Devon in the 1920s researchers who have contributed information to this chapter

Michael Blower, Robin Blythe-Lord, John Bowden, Ralph Marshall Brown, Wendy Buckingham-Arnold, Muriel Bunclark, Barbara Cole, Carolyn Daniel, Judy Davies, Margaret Fitsell, Marilyn Hambly, Anne Hawkins, Jocelyn Hemming, Stephen Hobbs, Rosemary Horrell, Alick Lavers, Tim Lomas, Martin McDonagh, Guy and Richard Moore, Charles Morris, Pam Morris, Alan Parsons, Richard Pengelly, Brenda Powell, Eileen Pratt, Heather Roche, Jacqueline Sarsby, Roger Tucker, Kate Weedon, Stuart Windsor.

[106] *My Plymouth Family in the 1920s*, contributed to the Devon in the 1920s project by Heather Roche.
[107] Donald Gould, *Donald's Memories.*