

The History of Transport in Leatherhead.

Roads

There has been a road system of some sort since the Roman times when Stane Street was built from London to Chichester . This road was a typical Roman road being about 15ft. in width with "metalling" of flints and sand. In the Saxon period the north-south and east-west "roads" are shown on an Ordnance survey map of the area. Of course in those days the only transport for 90% of the population was by foot. As the majority of the population were involved in farming the need for travel by the common man was negligible.

It is thought that there has probably always been a bridge of sorts across the Mole at Leatherhead as records of the 13th and 14th century mention money collected for the bridge repairs. So one can be certain that foot traffic and horses, if not coaches and carts would have used it. Some of the ancient roads, although still in use as tracks or pathways, have ceased to be used for major traffic. A typical example of this is Worple road which runs behind the church in the direction of Dorking.

By the late middle ages the town centre roads were the cross roads as we know them today with the market house in the middle. The roads , such as there were, would be dusty in the summer and muddy in the winter. As well as people, horses and coaches, the roads were used by farmers to drive there cattle to market. In the mid 1600 hundreds coaches regularly went to London and south to Chicester and Arundle. Any repairs to the roads was carried out by local farmers and tradesmen under the watchful eye of the highways surveyor. The 1627 Act required main roads to be 24feet wide with a directional stone or post at crossroads. However the real improvements in road surface had to wait until people like Telford and McAdam and the Turnpike Acts of the 19th century.

Any convential road system, as we know it, was practically non- existent until the start of the 19th century apart from the old well worn tracks between major towns. Roads in the Weald and throughout Surrey were a boggy, muddy mess where wagons, which got stuck in the autumn, often remained there all winter

Pack horses being the main form of transport along the ridges and high ground. Such was the state of the roads that where good roads serviced a town the prices were cheaper, which of course had a "knock on" effect all round.

However by C1820 it is reported that England had the best Turnpikes in Europe. In Surrey they ran North -South between Kingston and Horsham and East West from Southwark to Guildford. The main crossing of these Turnpikes being at Leatherhead where the river Mole had a good river bridge. The toll house in the high street collected more rent than any other in the area .

With the roads came more and better coaches and by the middle of the 1800,s there were daily services to London and the South coast. As many as eight a day passed through Leatherhead,

stopping at the Swan Inn , which was the regular staging post. Coaching continue until the coming of the railways in the middle/late years of the century.

Although the railways had the upper hand during the Victorian period the roads made a come back in the latter years of the century because of the fashion for cycling and the "new fangled" motor car. The construction of more and better roads followed naturally as a consequence of the motor car. Leatherhead was bypassed by the middle of the 20th century and of course the M25 caused major upheaval when it was constructed in the 1970's. Despite the fact that many of Leatherheads roads still need a lot of repair they are a far cry from the old turnpikes or wagoners' tracks of the 17th and 18th century.

The high street of Leatherhead was pedestrianised by 1981 and the surrounding roads were made into a one way system when the Swan Centre was built at the same time.

The Railways.

Along with many other towns throughout the country, the arrival of the railways brought prosperity and people to Leatherhead. The first to arrive was a line from Epsom by the London and South-Western Railway in 1859. Later another line was added by the London, Brighton and South Coast Railway with a connection to London Bridge as well as Waterloo. The station was originally on the east side of Kingston Road. When the two lines introduced the station was moved closer to the town with two stations. Connections to the south coast took until the middle of the 1860's before being operational. By 1885 Leatherhead had connections to many parts of Surrey and the coast as well as to London. The station serving the London and South-Western railway was abandoned in 1927. The bridge over the river Mole is an elegant structure typical of many built by the Victorians.