

K. M. DALLAS

HORSE POWER



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THE COACH HORSE

AUSTRALIAN coaching services grew rapidly after the gold rushes and the spread of railways merely gave them new scope beyond the numerous railheads. They maintained their high quality right to the end when they were suddenly displaced by motor buses. The evolution of the light horse type for this industry was all of a piece with the evolution of the Light Horse that dominated the campaigns of the first World War in Sinai and Palestine.

In 1837 the Rev. J. D. Lang wrote: "The colonial horse is of much more varied parentage than the colonial man — the English racer, the draught horse from the midland counties of England and the farm horse from the west of Scotland; horses from the Cape of Good Hope, horses of the genuine Arab breed from Persia and horses of Spanish origin from Valparaiso; Acheen ponies from Sumatra and ponies of a still more diminutive size from the island of Timor, have all been naturalised and have all thriven in the colony." He might have added the Cleveland Bay and the Flanders horse, imported ten years earlier by the Cressy Company, but the parsonical rhetoric may serve to remind us that early settlers had had diverse experience of horses and so brought here animals of diverse types — all suitable for purposes they had in mind. Note his distinction between "draught" horse and "farm" horse — the slow, heavy Shire breed for the brewer's dray or the timber jinker and the lighter, livelier Clydesdale for farm work and long distance road transport.

In those days horses were wanted for mobility, in saddle or harness. Oxen were cheaper for rough ploughing and hauling timber. Much cultivation then was by convict gangs with spade and hoe just as in Britain and Ireland there were gangs of pauperised labourers who were so cheap to feed that they "did a good horse out of a job". So at first the light saddle horse type

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was most wanted; as roads improved the carriage types were imported and bred. The best of these was the Cleveland Bay, a type bred for the coaching roads then being made in Britain by Metcalfe, Telford and Macadam, thereby adding new words to the language. In 1897 an American report describes a "macadam road with a few spots of telford where the ground is naturally wet". The first is still with us in the debased coinage of "tarmac".

In the year Lang wrote that comment two rival coach services already linked Hobart and Launceston. Services to nearer settlements like Longford or New Norfolk began earlier, as soon as roads were built. A stage coach had relays of horses at each stage so to run the through service in fifteen hours required twenty-four horses. A coach was like an electric car which left its spent batteries for re-charging. Staging stables also hired horses to private travellers on the through or branch routes, like the post houses of English roads which added "post office" to the language. Until the Main Line railway was built there were night and day coaches on the Launceston-Hobart run, each taking fifteen hours and charging thirty shillings outside and forty inside. Thus were professional and private travellers carried, at the highest economical speed. One prime source of the demand for speed and regularity was from the "Royal Mail". Men of commerce, bagmen, crooks, lawyers and parsons — as when in 1853 the fugitive Irish patriot, John Mitchel, travelled south disguised as a priest with a magistrate for company — provided a demand for Precision, Uniformity and Speed, those distinguishing qualities of an acquisitive society.

By 1870 another aspect of travel had appeared: the Excursionists' Guide of that year describes in detail the regular routes with their scenic attractions as well as the trout fishing of the highland lakes. Tourism used the services which commerce had established. Hire-and-drive services supplemented the coaches that ran to the Fern Tree Bower and carried anglers from Bothwell to the Great Lake.

Railways were built piecemeal and stage by stage, as the traffic density warranted the higher capital outlay, but this merely gave new railheads for coach services. In 1891 James Fenton wrote of the last coach service from Devonport to Ulverstone but already it extended to Wynyard while ten years earlier the Stanley-Wynyard service had begun.

This Stanley-Wynyard run, with extensions to parts inland and also farther west, operated for about 35 years. From 1879 to 1882 a road opened through the forest land was being improved. Grandfather had contracts to improve sections of this, using a steam-engined stone crusher hired from the government. A faded photograph shows the old man standing beside the first coach to

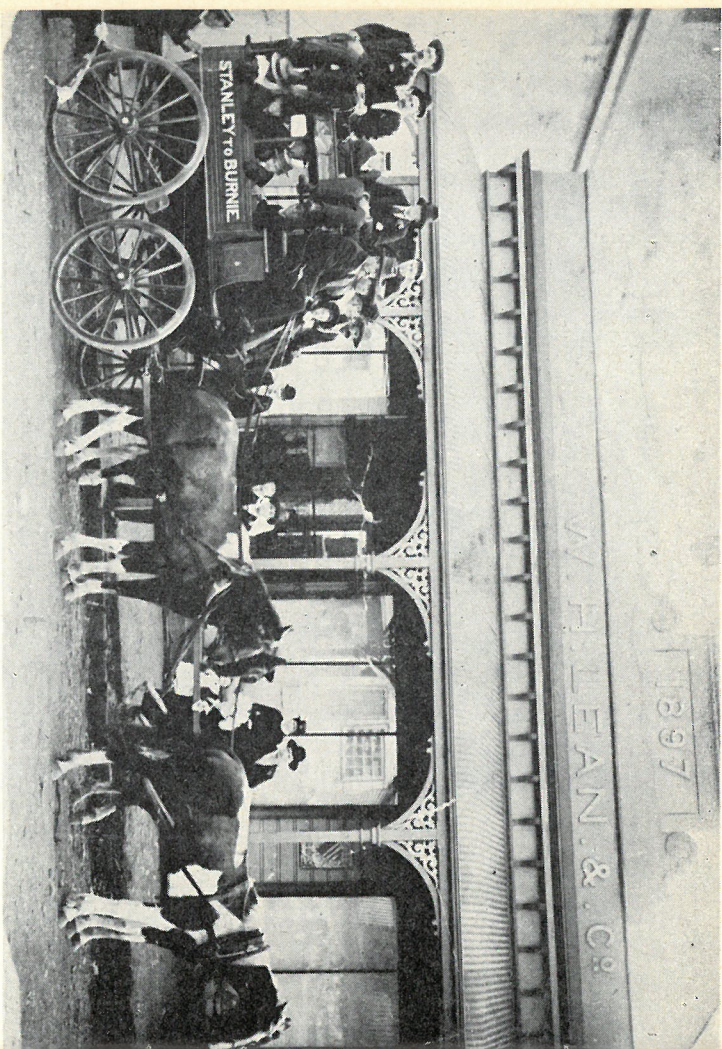
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lorry to the district, a Benz five-tonner, owned by Diprose of Wynyard, with wide steel back wheels, which carried the heavy timbers for the New Wharf at Launceston as far as Wynyard railway station. It played havoc with the surface of the coaching road, helped by the new motor buses which supplanted the coaches.

Even the formed roads were rough ways, useable only for valuable goods or for special occasions. The old hands told how once a year they went to the Stanley races — the girls in the bullock dray with their ball dresses packed in boxes, the lads on horses which might compete in the races: six hours or more, through deep sand or boggy stretches, fording shallow rivers. They dressed, after the races, for the ball and afterwards travelled home, with the help of "Paddy's lantern", sleeping as they might in the dray, arriving in morning light to the daily round of house, dairy and farm work. Only the driver of the team had to be awake. As roads improved and horse drawn carts were used, even the driver might sleep: the horse knew his way home and took his own time, even grazing along the roadside as they slept.

In that world of slow travel farmers sometimes made long journeys with their own carts, stopping overnight or even for whole days with friends. Such visits were informal and unannounced; it was common for callers to stay overnight. The clergy used horse and trap; dentists made a quarterly round by bicycle; our itinerant hawkers, Syrian or Indian, had a heavy hooded cart, stowed with boxes of haberdashery, aprons, frocks, shirts, cutlery, watches and drugs. Bundles were even slung under the axle. A watchdog and a sleepy horse that moved about a mile an hour completed the outfit. The last and best known was called Lyon Nasif, a Syrian Armenian, very stout with greying black hair, curling moustaches and plain gold earrings. Even when he "put up" at our farm he slept in his cart. One day when he had dinner with us he gave me the fright of my life. Mother had asked him about the Turkish atrocities towards the Armenians and his eyes flashed as his husky voice described them but to illustrate his words he rose, placed his heavy left hand on my head, twisted it sharply left and drew his right hand swiftly across my throat and jugular vein.

It was a world in which the horse was the dominant source of power for all travel, both within it and with the other worlds outside. By saddle, light cart, spring dray, dray, wagon or timber truck — for all movement except shank's pony — the fuel came from the farm. The accessories of leather, chain, rope, steel wire or bar iron (for shoes and tyres) came in bulk from factories or were made up to order by local blacksmiths, saddlers and wheelwrights. The late Jim Ford of Sheffield told how his father went



Tatlow's Royal Mail in Stanley about 1912. Charles Tatlow in the box seat. Horses bred by Tatlow.

pass through — a two-horse wagonette, with four passengers. In 1890 he was killed while carting wool to Stanley, crushed beneath the overturned cart. It was the driver of the morning coach who found the body and brought the news.

Before the inland route was opened there was a mail service by packhorse along the coast track over the heathy hills — the track used by Hellyer and Robinson fifty years before and by the aborigines before them. Old Ben Maidment who was in our time groom to our stage coach horses told how he "rode the mail", fording rivers on their bars. From the earliest times there had been sea transport and Stanley was served by the Melbourne-Launceston steamers. In river mouths and sheltered bays there were small jetties where cutters and ketches came for freight of palings and potatoes. In 1895 a jetty was built in the cove east of Rocky Cape. To us it was just "the Port"; a rough road round the gravel hills joined it to the Main Road. Small steamers used the port to load farm produce. In 1912 the Lune Timber Company built a big sawmill on the main road and a wooden tramline to the Port, powered for a time by a steam locomotive but mostly by half-bred horses. This mill also brought the first motor

there in 1877 to build a flour mill and stayed to open a wheelwright's shop which Jim carried on. In 1956 he retired, at 82, when "there was no longer enough repair work".

It was the coaching services, by main roads and branch roads, that tied all these communities together. They brought a regular flow of news and commercial information as well as small parcels from mail order firms or spare parts for machinery; they kept the rural producers in touch with business and government though many officials had their own horse and cart, for which a horse allowance was paid, even when the school inspector or police trooper enjoyed farm hospitality.

The coach drivers had to be much more than that. Their main job was to drive the coach and team, deliver and pick up mails from post offices and private bags as well and collect fares and small freight charges. There was no guard, as in English services. They were driver, guard and hostess as well. They were known by their first names to all distinguished travellers and had to keep order and discipline en route but the people on their route looked to them for many gratuitous favours—a prescription to be picked up from the chemist, a child to be seen safely on to the train. They were public institutions, expected to know everyone and everything, serving for six long days in the week. So when Tommy Anderson died there was a universal grief; his successor on our route, Alf Hardy, soon became equally famous and important.

It is because they were much more than coach drivers that they carried on when the change to motor buses came. They knew the people and the roads; they had road sense and traffic sense. It was a logical succession—just as the Sikhs of Calcutta were first the gharry wallahs because they were horsemen and became taxi drivers because they had road sense.

The Stanley-Wynyard coach had two stages. It left at 7 a.m. and stopped at our farm at 9 a.m. to change teams and pick up mails. It took another two hours to Wynyard to connect with a separate, more frequent service which caught the Launceston train from Burnie. The Stanley end was a level road; the Wynyard run had many steep grades and hairpin bends—strange that we did not call them that when hair pins were universal. They were just sharp bends, with proper names like Deep Gully, or the Devil's Elbow. For all that each 18-mile stage was done in two hours, in all weathers and seasons. The standard gait was the trot though on the steepest grades the team fell into a fast walk and through the dips broke into a hand gallop to gather speed for the hill beyond. The horses were fit and well-fed and would go till they dropped; they sometimes did just that. With the team at speed a horse sometimes went down neck and crop, stone

dead. It made a mess but the harness was untangled, the carcass rolled off the road and the team went on with the remaining three. If the coach was ever late it was because of fallen trees; in gales the dead, gaunt stringy barks fell across road and telegraph line. The coach had to wait until the trunk was sawn and rolled aside or find a way around the obstacle.

At our place it went like this: we were standing by at coach time and as soon as it stopped the team was unhooked and rushed to a temporary stable. The Wynyard four, which had come in two nights before, were already harnessed and were led out and hitched up. Meanwhile the passengers stretched their legs or went to our front parlour for tea and hot scones. The driver's main charge was to deliver and pick up mails in person. As he came back the passengers took their seats; he climbed to the box seat where the long leather reins were hitched round the top of the iron brake lever. The team stood ready, two and two, tense and "rarin' to go" with old Ben holding the nearside leader. The driver took all four reins in his left hand, in pairs between his fingers, his whip in his right hand, his right foot on the brake. All set—"Right-o Ben"—and as Ben stepped back all four strained into the collars, the leaders plunging to start the heavy load. They moved from quick walk to a trot and broke into a canter to gather speed for the steep hill. On it they fell back to a trot and then to a springy walk until they topped the brow.

Then we were free to tend the incoming team. They were moved to the four empty stalls, unharnessed and led out to the roadside trough. (Always let a horse cool down before drinking.) In hot weather we also splashed them copiously with a dipper to wash off dust and sweat, scraped them half dry and led them back to the stalls. Each got a heaped dish of oaten chaff laced with a dipperful of crushed oats. They were groomed down and fed again in the afternoon.

The returning coach arrived at 7 p.m. In winter it was already dark. We watched from the stable window—always a group of farmers waiting for the mail, yarning, smoking Dark Havlock while the hollow crunch of horses at feed sounded from the mangers. "Us kids" snuggled in dry straw under the mangers, quiet as mice, so that we might be allowed to share the vigil and listen to the yarns and jokes. "There she comes now" was said as soon as the coach lamps showed over the hilltop. All were asit at once, out to light the acetylene lamp above the water trough. As it flashed we heard the horses break into a gallop down the last straight. They pulled up sharply, hard held with brake hard on, their breath steaming in the cold night air, their coats dark with sweat, gleaming in the aura of bright light. Sometimes after a hard run to make up time they showed distended nostrils "like

pis full of blood to the brim". We knew Browning; we knew he did not exaggerate. Unhooked, uncoupled, they were led away to the spare stable while the driver got down and, walking a little stiffly, went to change the mails. The team that had come that morning from Stanley was all ready. They were led out and hitched in a few minutes, impatient to be gone for home. Ben held them until Tommy Anderson returned and took his seat. At the word he let go and stood back and they were away into the night.

We then brought the inward team to the warm stalls and unharnessed them by the dim kerosene lantern. They were led to water but not splashed down, not in winter, then back to be fed, groomed and bedded down. They were always rugged at night. This team rested with us all the next day and took the morning coach on to Wynyard the day following. That was the only concession to steep grades. The same speed was maintained, though loads were if anything heavier and there were more stops for mail. The Stanley teams did 36 miles daily, in two bursts, for two months, and then were spelled for a month at grass. Fast work, heavy work, and in all weathers. They had to be fed, housed and shod on top lines.

The man directly in charge of this at our place was old Ben who formerly rode the mail. He was short, bronzed and wiry with a grizzled beard — we sometimes called him "King Edward" in fun but usually just "Ben". He was older than Dad and always called him "Robert" while Mum was "Missus". To us kids he was an oracle of wisdom and our unfailing friend; his creed was one of honesty, hard work and frugal living. Through him we learned imperceptibly the lore of horses and how to tend them and also the management of vegetable gardens, of which he was also the master. When talk of wars came up, perhaps during one of the crises of those times, he said: "There will always be war as long as this wurru'd's a wurru'd." We often heard tales of the recent Boer War (there were veterans in the district) and of such "wurru'd-shaking" events as the loss of the "Waratah" and of the "Orion", a small potato boat that sailed from Stanley one stormy night and was lost without trace. The loss of the "Titanic" filled the news for weeks as also did the great fire of 1912 in the Mt. Lyell mine.

Ships were always news. We made a special journey to Stanley to see H.M.S. "Fantomé" whose one gun of 2-inch calibre was a mighty thing compared to the muzzle loading sporting guns of our experience. We usually went to the Stanley Show and also to special occasions like the turning of the first sod of the Stanley-Trowutta railway. With local news of balls and concerts or the

travelling picture show there were plenty of topics of conversation. We saw the newsreel of "Prince Foote" winning the 1912 Melbourne Cup. It was a world of oral news. So it was a great privilege to be allowed to sit in the straw in some quiet corner of the stable and hear the gossip of this man's world from the waiting group of farmers smoking plug tobacco cut with their Joseph Rodgers pocket knives — talk of horses, crops or weather or of the Johnson-Burns fight in Sydney compared with the Johnson-Jeffries fight of an earlier year.

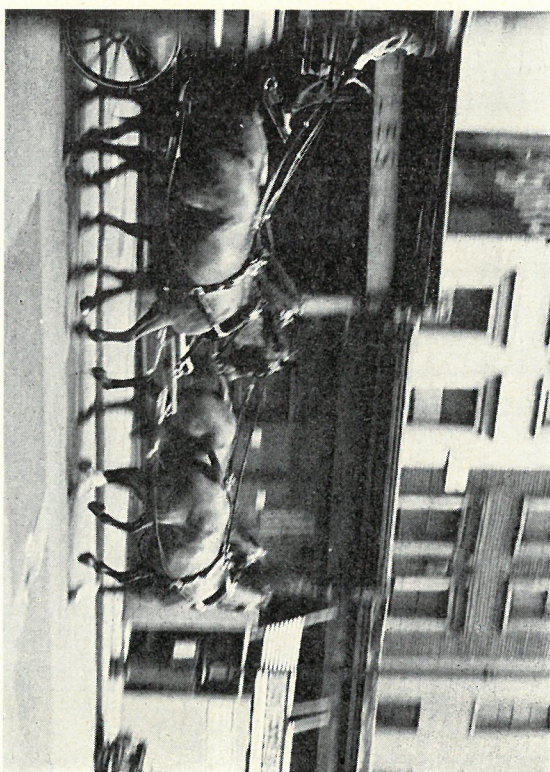
Ben was always there. He lived two miles away and walked before daylight to his work. The lantern was lit, chaff and oats were carried to each manger and to the loud munching of eight horses he cleaned their stalls, removed their rugs and groomed them. Then he joined us at breakfast before harnessing the Wynyard team.

All concerned with this service gave the best they knew—there was no government official to tell us how. So for the horses the breeding was as meticulous as the feeding. Most big coaching concerns bred their own. Tatlow had pedigreed trotting stallions and bred from mares retired after proving their quality. Hard roads give speed and regularity but demand special qualities in horses as well as in vehicles. The Cleveland Bay, proved in English coaches, was no doubt a basic strain but we never heard of it. Our breeds, for hard and hilly roads, were more of the pony size. Staying power might be called for in many ways but the hard going at speed, day in day out, found out defects of hooves and fetlocks. The fetlock was the vulnerable point. Not only do larger horses need more food; they are also more likely to go lame with constant work. So the smaller, lighter type, with some hair on fetlocks too, but well boned, had less weight to carry. It is a simple case of the power-weight ratio of the prime mover—as it was when the petrol engine prevailed over steam in road transport. It was the flexible suspension of the under carriage of the coach horse that made for greatest efficiency on hard roads.

It is common knowledge that the pneumatic tyre and coiled steel springs made the bicycle the poor man's horse but long before that happened the coach owners bred horses with sound ankles. Hence also the preference for the trotting gait which could stand the hammer, hammer, hammer on the hard high road at ten miles per hour. A loping canter might be easier on dry, sandy tracks. It is not merely the concussion that hurts—repeated blows generate heat in hooves as in other things. On hot macadam roads the heat can be considerable. So a smaller, lighter type was bred, not unlike the waters that, almost since Australian settlement began, were bred for Indian army use. The stock horses and coach horses of the Riverina or the Monaro

were drawn on in 1914 for the Light Horse just as some remounts were bought from the coaching pony types of north-west Tasmania.

To us they were just star boarders—we did not work with them as we did with the farm horses. We merely had the tasks of feeding, grooming and harnessing. So only a few are remembered as persons and these mainly the hard cases. There were ex-race-horses, even one ex-circus horse. There was a big, flea-bitten grey called "Jeffries" but who now would guess that he was so named from the great white hope who fought Jack Johnson? He was also known for his reluctance to start, which was due, so some guessed, to blindness. He was the nearside poler of his team and



Coach Team, Camden Town, London, 1956

as the others moved off Jeffries plunged and propped. Whipping was useless—it upset the others too. So a rope was passed round his foreleg and sawed to and fro until it hurt. After some minutes of this he moved off and gave no more trouble—until next time.

Vonda was a little black mare who was ticklish. If you rubbed hard under her belly she gave vent to fiendish squeals which we often evoked to startle nousey female passengers who came into the stable. She was a great favourite—Alf Hardy named his daughter after her.

Bred for spirit and bone and sound feet, they were worked at three years; some were tried even at two because they were too spirited but this led to puffy fetlocks. There was one at least who was not worked until four and he was indomitable. After eighteen miles he was still hard to hold and on one occasion was sent straight on with the Wynyard team—36 miles in four hours. What's in a name? He was called Tiger.

At holiday times teams of five were used, with three abreast in the lead but the greatest sight of all was the special team of six greys, marched in pairs, which Charles Tallow drove in person. Six ribbons in hand! It was quite a feat to manage that lot, to hold and steer them on steep and winding roads with only the foot brake to check the speed. They were used for special characters, such as when the Corricks' concert party toured the north-west coast.

We might note here that if ever the brake broke the only way to avert disaster was to whip the team to top speed to keep it ahead of the coach until it reached the bottom and then slow down on the level stretch or next upgrade.

Stanley was the port, the commercial centre and so the logical terminus. Beside the Wynyard service it ran branch services to Smithton, Montagu and other places, with a livery service on demand. How many now can understand what the signboard, "Livery and Bait Stables", meant? So allowing for accidents, sickness, resting, training and special services there were probably 200 horses on strength. The terminal was a high, wide, wooden structure with vast doorways at each end so that coaches could drive inside. On either side of the stone paved hall were rows of stalls, perhaps twenty on each side, with chaff stores and harness rooms. The work of cleaning, polishing and greasing, the stocks of harness oil, axle grease, candles, horse shoes and the number of groomers, stable boys, can be imagined. The candles used in all carriages were a special quality for clear burning in all weather. Oil lamps were less reliable and also dangerous.

At our half way point there was an eight-stall stable, built of split palings and lined to the wall plates. The floor was of two inch plank; the stall partitions were of pit-sawn blackwood, double sided; manglers also were of blackwood. A skillion at one end covered the chaff bin, made from a piano case. There were glazed windows on the side opposite the stalls and two trap doors for sweeping out dung and fouled straw. Harness pegs lined this back wall, one for each horse. In the stalls the neck-ropes were rove through iron ringbolts and counterweighted to prevent looping round horses' front legs.

All coach harness was of good leather except haines which were of two symmetrical halves, shaped from a rustless white metal

alloy. The collars were light and strong, lined with soft leather. They were shipped up under the neck and buckled at the top. Traces were of several layers of stout leather fixed to the haimes by being looped through a slot and backsewn. Leaders' harness had a small saddle with a light bellyband to hold traces from sagging when slack. Polers sometimes had a crupper with a long back strap to the collar to prevent it from slipping forward from the pull of the pole straps. There was no breeching with coach harness. A pole is not so suitable as shafts for the use of breeching but also the horses were too light to have any useful effect on holding back a heavy coach. So a coach had no reverse gear and the only means of controlling it on downhill going was the brake.

In hitching the team the polers were swung into place and reins and cross couplings buckled on. The pole end projected two feet beyond their chests. It had two heavy steel staples with heavy straps rove through them; the free ends of these were buckled through the bottom of the collars. Thus they gave a pull at an angle of thirty degrees to the line of the pole itself. As the pole was built into the centre of the fore-carriage of the coach the backward and sideways pull of the straps turned the whole front carriage. Thus a coach was steered by the power of its main engine. Also the drawbar for the polers' traces was rigidly fixed to the fore-carriage so that on a turn the traces of the outer horse helped the collar pull of the inner.

Also on the pole end were the leaders' swingle trees — three — a middle one with lighter ones at each end, and to these the leaders' traces were hooked. Leather traces were probably dearer than steel chains but were safer. They were more rigid and less likely to foul the legs. Chains also may kink and snap from sudden jerks. In general, the harness was designed for lightness and strength.

In hitching the reins were always rigged first. Each rein had a branch to the other horse and was rove through fixed rings on back saddle and haimes before buckling to the bitrings. So the pull was on both horses at once.

Harnessing was light work that boys could do. The trace ends were crossed over the loins. The winkers were not put on until just before the team was wanted; it took a few seconds to slip them on, taking care that the bit went into the mouth. Some horses tried to dodge this. The horses were not tall; we knew the proper way to work and there was only one. Always work from the near side; always warn the horse that you are coming. Speak loudly. These little rites and ceremonies called drill were expected by well-trained animals who knew our voices and our ways.

Each horse was led out to its place; couplings fixed, reins rove through guide rings before buckling on; pole straps buckled to collars. Then, and then only, were the traces hooked on. The head groom held the nearside leader firmly until the driver mounted and settled himself and called "Let go!". A proper routine whose prime purpose was safety.

Sunday was a true day of rest for them and us; grooming, feeding and watering were done more leisurely. Each team was turned out to water separately. One Sunday midday a team with their rugs on was drinking at the trough. A leader finished first and moved off towards Wynyard. His mate moved to join him; we ran too late to stop them; the polers followed so we watched all four trot up the hill and disappear. We advised Wynyard by telephone. They trotted into the stables there a few hours later with their rugs still on. So next morning the resting team did their run for them.

All their feedstuff was grown on the farm. Every three weeks there was a chaff-cutting which for us meant a day from school. The barn was long and high, with heavy slab walls and an earth floor, save at the machine end which was floored with pilsawn blackwood planks. Worn smooth from decades of hay pitching, it made a splendid floor for a dance and was often used for this before the public hall was built. The chaff cutter was fixed to the floor; the drive belt from the engine house ran through a side door. Steam was raised and the cutter blades sharpened; then as soon as the morning coach had gone the cutting began. Sheaves were fed head first into the jaws; the chaff streamed through the shaking staves to the floor and was raked back and piled loose against the wall. All day, with short stops to sharpen knives and raise steam, the sheaves were pitched and fed until a heap of four tons of chaff rose up the walls.

About 1910 the first motor cars passed by. They were such futile things that few foresaw how soon their improved successors would supplant the coaches. They travelled little faster than a good trotter — except downhill. The first to spot an approaching dust cloud shouted "motor car!" and we all ran to see it splutter as it passed. We knew what would happen. It tried to gather speed to mount the big hill. About half way up it faltered, stopped and ran backwards to the bottom. After a second attempt, perhaps in reverse gear, the driver, in goggles and dust coat, came walking back to ask for a tow. We put the road harness on old Brisk, a bulldog-built and pigeon-toed draught mare, and sneaked them over the top. Off they sailed, leaving us with dust, benzine fumes and a silver florin.

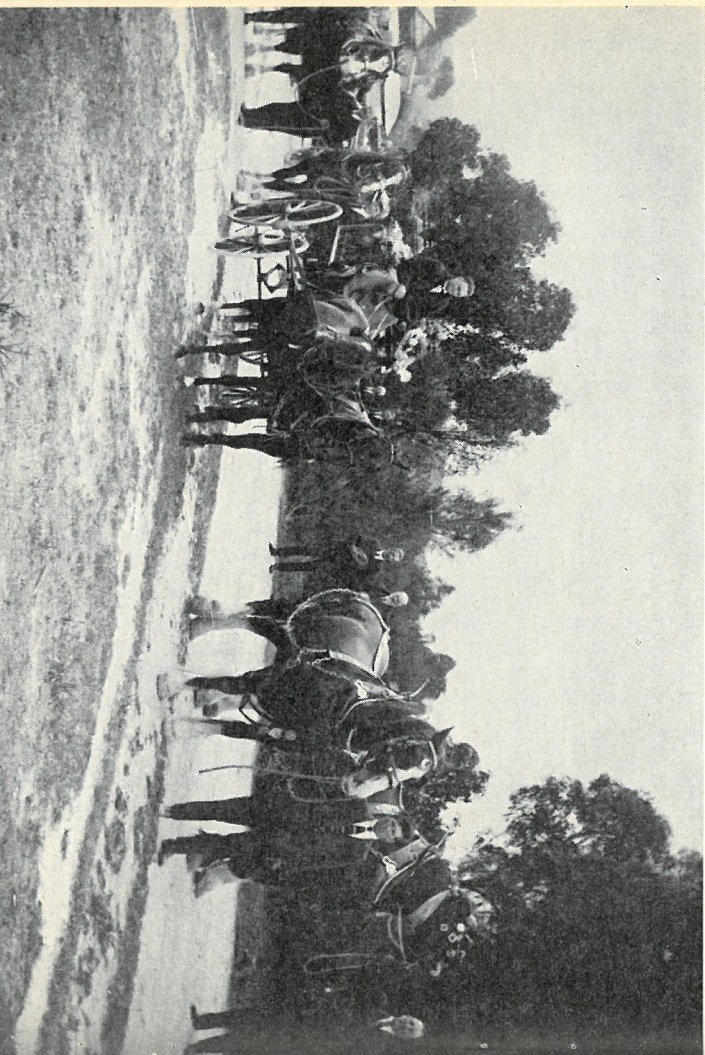
Bigger, faster cars came, some with demon drivers. One of these was a young priest named T. J. O'Donnell who sped down

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that hill so fast that a portmanteau shot out of the back seat and fell on to the road. We retrieved it; an hour later he walked back to our place to ask for a tow. He stood there, red faced, and holding in his hand a broken steel bar, while Dad dressed him down like a Dutch uncle on how men of religion should not show such disregard for their lives. For T. J. O'D. to take such censure lying down he must have been very much scared by his narrow escape.

The great disaster came in 1912, just before Christmas. On a hot summer morning, with a light easterly wind, the nearly empty barn caught fire and in half an hour was a heap of ashes and scrap iron. Adjoining cart sheds and spare stables went too. (Us kids playing with crackers.) The coach horses were turned out at once but their stable and the engine shed escaped. The new season's hay was almost ready for cutting so a new barn was needed quickly. Dad hired Harry Walters on a contract price and with green timber from the sawmill he and his two sons finished it in three weeks. It had weatherboard walls twenty feet high, an iron roof and massive cross beams. I wrote, to Harry's dictation, the order for nails, spouting, iron, ridging, solder, bolts and hinges. Harry said "rizing" which stumped me but as he also

Cortege of Mr. James Davis, cartage contractor, of Burnie. Mr. Myron's hearse, attended by four prize Clydesdales with road harness, led by his drivers.



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said "sawder", which I knew, and had bracketed "rizing" with spouting, he only had to say it three times.

Harry was a tireless worker when sober but he had an end in view. The nearest pub was at Stanley. On the Saturday morning the drouth was on him and he came to Dad for a draw. "No, Harry; not a penny till the job's done." Harry pleaded, almost weeping. It shocked me to see a grown man beg, like a child asking for lollies. He said, "You are a hard man, Robert", but that did no good either. Though Dad, as I learned in later years, was openhanded to a fault to all in need, he dared not give way for he knew that if he did he would see no more of Harry while cash or credit lasted. So that Sunday Harry took me fishing with him and we got the barn on time. Until the new cutter chaffed the half-dried hay the horses had to eat the smoked stuff from the inside of the charred heap left after the fire.

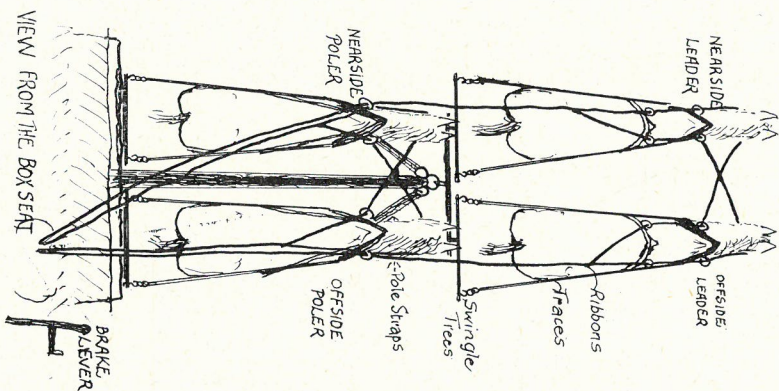
It was "business as usual" but none foresaw how near was the end. A railway was certain — some day — but such events as the mass production of the "Tin Lizzie", which began in 1909, did not reach us. We were more concerned with the death of Edward VII and the crowning of George V, Halley's Comet, the Balkan Wars, the loss of the "Titanic" and Scott's heroic death in the Antarctic. Though the railway was extended to Myalla, only ten miles away, the coaches for a time ran to Wynyard. The opening of the Myalla line was marked by a marvellous train excursion to Ulverstone. The sudden outbreak of World War I obliterated any clear recollection of the last run of the coaches. This was helped by the glittering brass work of the first mail cars—Napier and Berliet. One evening a small mob of Light Horse remounts — unbroken two-year-olds that had been bred for the coaches — rested in the stables. They were beautiful animals, dark bays with black points, the waler type. They went on next morning, their halter ropes linking them six abreast, conscripts of the war. That is my last clear memory of our coaches.

That ended our home market for chaff and oats. The new barn and machinery were redundant; bagged chaff, cut by a travelling cutter, was sold to distant merchants, but there was a more serious sequel. It was not until years later that we learned that the coaching business was insolvent and that large arrears for the board of the horses were never paid. Dad would have scorned to go to law, even if it would have done any good. His debtor was a gentleman and lifelong friend who was just unfortunate. One took such losses calmly. That philosophy also became a casualty of war and inflation. In cold blood all this meant that our hard work of those last two years, of growing hay, cutting chaff and tending horses, was done for no pay — except the

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satisfaction of a job well done, of keeping faith with those who trusted in us.

Coach services were still active then in many parts of Tasmania—the north-east and east coast services, the Huon valley, the west coast mining districts and the central plateau. The Great Lake-Waddamana power scheme was built with materials hauled by horse teams from the railhead at Apsley. In 1912 the Webster-



Rometch coaches still ran tourists to the Springs. You may find a reminder of that in Oslo. They have there in a museum the famous "Fram" herself and on the walls a large photograph of Amundsen's party in a coach on our mountain road. Hobart was their first port but the news of the South Pole journey was cabled to Norway so that the announcement could be made by King Haakon. So the Hobart press missed a scoop and the Norries, as Scott's people called them, gained a reputation.

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In 1928 Bert Cartledge, who then kept a hotel at Temma, told of an episode in his coaching days. In 1912 he ran a coach between Queenstown and Gormanston. While on a visit to Launceston he was offered a fine pair of polers at a bargain price—no doubt because the electric trams had made bus horses redundant. The cost of sending them by train to Queenstown was prohibitive so he decided to overland them. It was late autumn with high risk of snow. Riding and leading he went by the Great Lake track to Marlborough and took the overland track. He knew there was no grazing from Derwent Bridge onward and his supply of chaff was nearly done. The weather broke. There were deep snowdrifts on the Navarre Plains and over Arrowsmith. The horses were already starving and weakening. He took the long odds and rushed them on. They scrambled through drift after drift. At the big ones he dismounted and broke a track on foot; then mounted each in turn and put him at it. For all the bitter cold he was in a muck sweat and nearly exhausted before they gained the descent into the Franklin valley. They had still thirty hungry miles before them. That was the price men were still prepared to pay for coach horses.

In 1910 Launceston was still a town of horse cabs and Spearman's buses ran from Invermay to the city. The rails of the trams were then being laid so that energy from the Duck Reach station was displacing that from chaff and oats. Launceston's Fire Brigade was still a splendid thing of red-painted firecars and grey horses. (Always grey horses for fire brigades.) Three cars were two-wheelers; I seem to recall one four-wheeler with a steam engine like a bath heater or donkey boiler, but drawn by two horses. All the cars had their shafts suspended from the ceiling and the harness was all hitched above them. When the alarm rang the catches of the horses' loose boxes fell and their doors swung open. The horses trotted round to their allotted places and stood under the shafts while the crews, in gleaming helmets and blue coats, let down shafts and harness. Girths and collars were fastened and blinkers slipped on and in seconds they were away, galloping through the streets with the bell continuously ringing to warn traffic of their right of way. They were powerful animals, capable of galloping a mile with a heavy cart and many men. It was long after the invention of the self-starter that any motor engine could equal that despatch and that speed, not to mention the sagacity.

With the passing of the coaching days a great number of high arts disappeared—breeding, schooling and tending of the horses themselves, and the skills of saddlers, farriers, coach makers, wheelwrights and others. We have in George Sturt's "*Wheelwright's Shop*" a unique and invaluable picture of the extinction

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of that group of tradesmen. Like Jim Ford of Sheffield they lingered on but had no apprentices. The coach stables became garages and a new class of mechanics appeared. Coach makers became motor body builders and new skills like panel beating appeared until pressed steel bodies said good-bye to all that also. The jack planes used by three generations of craftsmen are now junk. Jim Ford had a mallet made by his father from sheoak cut in Epping Forest. You could feel, but not see, the slight depression worn in its handle by the thumb pressure of a century of use.

Some products of their fine arts may be seen in museums but only from surviving tradesmen can we learn that those monogrammed panels were made of a cedar veneer backed with glued canvas and the final colour pattern was the result of seven, or was it nine, successive coats of hard enamel, each rubbed smooth with pumice stone before the next was applied. You can't learn such arts by getting a technical college diploma. Even the common farm wagons and drays, turned out in vermilion with blue scrolled trimmings, were the work of craftsmen who had served a long apprenticeship before they were allowed even to touch the fine tools.

Behind all this were the horses, equally products of man's skill. Trained to be his eyes, ears and memory, they were sentient partners in his daily round and, if need arose, in desperate encounters with death and wounds — and not in war alone. In the threats we faced from flood, fire and drought and in bringing the doctor, midwife or priest to serve our extremest needs, it was the horse to which we turned.

The qualities of keeping faith, of giving without being asked, or of giving without expecting any return or even wondering what return might come, were cultivated by that way of life and grew partly from their example. People who lived in daily comradeship with them were proud of their comrades, though they didn't spout about it and made ribald remarks about any who did. We were responsible for them and learned from them to be patiently responsible and to give, as they did, when war or other calamity called for it, "that last full measure of devotion". We knew what old Rocky meant when he said of his hunting dog: "When the time comes it's his dooty to see it through and be killed, same as a man's." We shared the feelings of the bushman who returned in 1919 disgusted with the stupidity and misery of war and who summed up his dislike of it by the revelation: "When I got back home I couldn't catch me 'orse an' me dog didn't know me."

Those who dimly grasped then these truths and feelings, though they never put them into words, and who remember with pride those men and horses who lived by that simple faith, can

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never accept the status symbol of the mechanical vehicle, however resplendent with chrome and colour it may be. They will all their days resent somewhat this new age with its mercenary social values, often without knowing why they do so, and will cherish in silence the memory of the comrades of those high and far off times, the men, the women, the horses.