

Horse & Motor Vehicles to St. Austell

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Going To St.Austell

A brief history of early Horse Drawn and Motor Vehicles in St.Dennis Parish

Passenger services from St.Dennis to St.Austell go back at least 130 years.

Wagoners are recorded in the parish censuses from 1851 but with no extra details as to the work they performed. Most can be considered as carrying China Clay between works and to port, or working on farms, my great grandfather William Kent was driving a China Clay wagon in 1861.

St.Dennis like many villages was quite self sufficient in the 19th century, and it needed to be being 6 miles from St.Austell with no passenger rail connection, only a freight branch line.

By 1851 the village could count a butcher, tailor, seamstress, cordwainer & shoemakers (both making shoes & boots), a draper, two grocers, dressmaker and confectioner along with masons, carpenters and blacksmiths (very important tradesmen because blacksmiths made and repaired anything in metal).

By 1891 they could boast in addition to the above, a watch maker & jeweller, coal merchant, music teacher, insurance agent, schoolmaster, police constable and a midwife & nurse. There were at this time two grocers and four who were drapers & grocers, several carpenters, masons & blacksmiths, many probably working on clay works and stone quarries.

But goods and parcels were delivered by horse & wagon from St.Austell, and until the late 1800's the local doctor had to be fetched on horseback from St.Austell.

The only way people had to access the greater variety and facilities in St.Austell was by horse, private horse & carriage or walking. Most men worked locally in pits and quarries but agricultural people needed to go to St.Austell market on a Friday every week.

As the population grew in the late 1800's Saturday half day working became common and with girls and men taking jobs in the town shops and businesses the need for transport became a necessity.

It is not entirely clear when the first horse drawn buses or wagons first started passenger services but it would be by the late 1880's. It is reported that early bus services were provided by a Truscott family but there are no details of their involvement.

James Bunt who in addition to being the manager of Goonvean Clay Works hired out Wagonettes and ran a regular two horse bus service to and from St.Austell on market day (Friday) and Saturday fare costing 6d each way.

Fred Stephens a farmer and clay agent of Hendra Lane also took people to and from town on market day and later added Saturday also. He was helped by his son Frederick Cuthbert Stephens.

An advert in the West Briton of 22nd April 1897 read "Steady man to live in house and to drive 3 horses and a wagon, wages commencing at £20 per year. Apply Fred Stephens, Hendra Lane, St.Dennis"

A Whitemoor farmer, John Key, also ran a horse van to and from St. Austell

As you can see to these early carriers of people transport was almost a sideline to another occupation. The terminus for these horse drawn buses was the New Inn, now demolished but stood behind Woolworths (later Poundland) in the town.

The Crowle name is probably best known in St.Dennis for transport services. Harry Crowle senior ran a horse drawn bus service from Fraddon where he lived, through St.Dennis to St.Austell, via Nanpean & Foxhole.

The first motor vehicle service in Cornwall was run by the Great Western Railway, surprisingly from Helston to the Lizard in 1903, presumably for the fairly new phenomenon of tourism. By 1908 the GWR had enough motor vehicles to start a motor service on the St.Dennis-St.Austell route on 3rd August, three trips a day taking 50 minutes each way with Milnes Daimler motor buses using a petrol and paraffin mixture. The St. Dennis terminus was at Trelavour.

There is an incident reported in the Cornishman newspaper of 11th November 1909 of the arrival of the motor bus from St.Austell "the car had almost reached its terminus when owing to the very slippery state of the road it was unable to take the gradient at the corner near the church schools and skidded back against the wall where it became

jammed. After a delay of nearly two hours, four powerful horses were attached, and with nearly 50 willing helpers with ropes managed to extricate the car from its awkward position”.

The GWR then opened an extension of their service to Newquay via St.Columb Road in 1910 but it was not successful. But on 2nd November 1911 they opened another service to St.Dennis via St.Stephen, Stepside, Treviscoe and across Hendra Downs to the village.

The Harry Crowle known to many older St.Dennis inhabitants was in fact Harry Crowle's son, Harry Crowle junior, born in 1894, who married Olive Yelland and moved to St.Dennis in 1922. He used an AEC motor bus given to him by his father. This didn't endear him to Fred Stephens whose St.Austell horse bus was just up Hendra Lane from Harry and his business unable to match the motor vehicle service ceased soon after.

Harry Crowle was very popular and he took on the existing GWR motor bus route to St.Austell. He also extended the St.Dennis route to Newquay via Indian Queens and St.Columb Road to cater for hotel workers, knitting factory workers and holidaymakers going to Newquay.

One person, not the brightest of sparks, was obviously an ardent supporter of Harry Crowle's service said one day “see I put one over on the GWR today” when asked how he had done that he replied “I bought a return ticket on the train to Newquay, but I come back on the bus!”

Increasing his motor vehicle stock to four Harry also ran Sunday School and Band of Hope trips operating from his garage in Hendra Lane (now known as Hendra Road).

In 1925 the Cornwall Motor Transport company (CMT) who started a Bodmin – Truro run via St.Dennis also competed for the existing GWR route from St. Dennis to St.Austell. But following an agreement with the GWR withdrew from that route.

By this time Harry Crowle had built Harvenna in Hendra Road and had acquired 2 garages and 8 motor buses & coaches. Among those employed by him were; Jack Liddicoat, Garnet Goodman, Tony Allen, Les Burt, Bill Drew, Ernest Lewis, Con Martin, Bill & Reg Williams and Prin & Claude Yelland. Claude Yelland was so short they had wooden blocks attached to the pedals so that he could reach them!

Although the St. Austell By-Pass was opened in 1926 it wasn't until 1937 that buses ran from St.Austell station via South Street to the By-Pass.

Summercourt Fair was the busiest day of the year, the last bus home being crammed with people inside and others sitting on the bus wings outside.

By 1930 Harry's health had deteriorated and he sold his business to the Mumford family who controlled Southern General and Cornish Buses, who took on the St.Dennis-St.Austell route. Shortly afterwards the GWR and National Omnibus & Transport Company merged as Western National and soon after again in 1931 Western National bought the Southern General and Cornish Buses business.

Harry Crowle's garage in Hendra Road became the out station for Western National, but was eventually demolished and the site now of two houses, his small garage opposite became Dave Yelland's car repair business.

After World War One the Kestle family became involved in motor transport. John Kestle and his two sons traded at Hendra Corner, Arnold as a general merchant and Sylvester, known as Sylvie, in the bakery.

In 1923 Arnold Kestle started a charabanc service for excursions and tours around Cornwall and in 1928 a market day service to St.Austell each Friday. The route went from Enniscaven through Gothers, Carne, St.Dennis, Nanpean, Goonamarris and Foxhole to St.Austell.

In 1932 Arnold gave up the general merchant business and took over Hendra Bakery from Sylvester. Apart from the St.Austell run there were excursions to Plymouth Navy Days for a £5 fare, Tavistock Goosey Fair, Padstow Obby Oss and St. Columb Major hurling. There were also Sunday afternoon mystery trips and he regularly took St.Dennis Band to concerts.

At the start of World War Two the excursions stopped and due to Arnold Kestle's ill health his operations ceased in 1942.

Please note :-

This article was written by me from my research and includes excerpts from the notes on the early days of bus transport in the St.Austell area villages by Roger Grimley.

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Thank you
Adrian

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