

MEMORIES OF OVERTON

Transport



The position of the village of Overton has always been significant because of its proximity to crossings of the River Dee. There were medieval fords at Erbistock and at Dutford (Asney Lane). At Erbistock this was supplemented by a pedestrian ferry boat which is just within living memory and evidence of which can be seen near the Boat Inn.

There was a stone bridge near the Cross Foxes Inn from the 15th century. The position of the early bridge was upstream of the present bridge. The road from Wrexham ran through the present car park across the front of the pub and then around a sharp steep corner down to the bridge. On the other side of the river the road would have come up what is now the drive in Minyrafon. The design of the bridge would have been similar to the old bridge at Bangor on Dee. Thomas Pennant says *"The bridge consists of two neat arches and was first built of stone by the munificence of Gwenhwyvar... a maiden lady who resided at Eytton."*



In "Overton in Days Gone By" by John Howson p53 it says *"The old bridge at Overton was so narrow that two carts could not pass on it, and so low that when the river was swollen a man could dip his hand into the water from the top of it. ... It had on each side a low wooden rail which we called the battlement. I once saw the lead horse of the stage coach in taking the Turn (on the Denbighshire side) run with their*

forelegs over the rail and I have heard old people say they could remember the coach, horses and passengers all fall over into in the river".

The bridge was replaced in about 1814 by Thomas Penson. (1790–1859) His father (also Thomas Penson) was the County Surveyor for Flintshire until he was dismissed after the new Overton bridge which he had designed with one arch

collapsed. His son designed the replacement (the present bridge) with two arches and shortly afterwards designed the north aisle of St Mary's.



The new bridge was downstream of the previous bridge and much higher with a large embankment created on either bank to reduce the gradient of the road on each side.

Barton's Bridge at Knolton was built in 1819.

Coaches & Tolls

Both the White Horse and the Bryn y Pys Inns were coaching inns where horses from different coaching companies would be changed. Stories are told that that the horn could be heard from Salop Road across the valley as the coach crossed Overton Bridge, warning the Inn to have the change of horses prepared. Overton was on the Chester to Bristol new Royal Mail route which left Chester at 7pm, calling at Wrexham, Ellesmere and arriving at Bristol at 12 noon the following day.

Chester Chronicle 11 January 1785 states *“TOLLS TO BE LET Notice is hereby given That the Toll Gates leading from Overton to Ellesmere and Hanmer will be let by auction at the Bowling Green in Overton, on Wednesday the 23rd next, between the hours of two and six o'clock in the afternoon, in the manner directeth by the Act passed by the Act in the thirteenth year of his present Majesty; which GATES were rented last year at £345. Whoever happens to be the best bidder must at the same time give security with sufficient sureties to the satisfaction of the Trustees, for a payment of the rent agreed at such times as they direct.”*



The tolls continued to be collected at 'Overton Gate' on the corner of Salop Road and Penyllan Street (and 'Maesgwaelod Bar' near Overton Bridge) till the 1870s. The tolls were used to pay for repairs and improvements to the road (*see toll ticket left*) but it was soon discovered that heavy carts and carriages caused more damage to the roads. The Trustees of Toll Roads then began installing weighbridges to weigh carts and charge tolls according to weight. The local trustees installed a weighbridge in a pit in front of Machine

House Penyllan Street, where the pavement is now. It was a bridge platform onto which a vehicle would drive with a system of weights and pivots below. Lever

bars took the weight and extended under the track into the Machine House were the weights were read (the same principal as kitchen balance scales).

In 1841 Roger Kynaston was the Toll Keeper. In 1851 Joseph Barrett was Toll Gate keeper as well as being Parish Clerk, in 1861 Mary Ann Catherall was collector of tolls, and in 1871 William Crewe with Martha Roberts as the 'machine keeper'. The Tolls were abolished in 1874 when local councils became responsible for roads. However the weighbridge was still used till the late 1930s.

Horses and Carts were the principal method of transport and delivery till the mid 20th century. The White Horse Inn also ran a carters business, transporting goods from the station and the brick and tile works at Ruabon (see accounts below for 1902)

Account for White Horse

July 24	To 2 Horses fetching coping from the Bannock	14	0
26	To fetching 1000 of bricks from yard	6	0
Aug 2	To 2 do do do do	8	0
6	To fetching tiles from the brick base	6	0
8	To 2000 of bricks from yard	12	0
	To do do fetching coping from Ouse	6	0
11	To 6 tons 10c of flooring bricks from the	16	3
14	To 8 tons 10c of do do do do	1	13
	To 1 ton of cement	2	6
19	To 2 Horses fetching pipes from the	14	0



The delivery cart from Bryn y Pys Hall in the High Street c1930s. Note the dog cocking his leg up the wheel!



Thomas Gabriel, 1828-1901, Carpenter and coffin maker of Salop Road, with Eli Williams born 1853 of Back Lane standing beside the cart. Photo c1890s

Gwydir House is in the background

Bicycles



The invention of the safety bicycle and the pneumatic tyre in the late 19th century led to them becoming everyday transport in the first half of the 20th century. People could travel further to their work and for leisure. Men from the village would cycle to work at the pit at Ifton Heath or Wrexham Trading Estate, Many people would bike to the railway station at Overton Station or at Ruabon. *(Picture left is Eric Austin at Firs Cottage c 1950)*

Frank Lloyd remembers biking to Ellesmere and Harry Evison remembers cycling from Penley to Overton for dances. There was no Sunday drinking in Overton (and Wales). During the 1950s Dave Austin remembers *"the avid drinkers meeting on Co-op corner each Sunday evening to cycle to Ellesmere for night on the booze and wobbling back home again at around 10pm. Joey Miles used to cycle from the Rhos every day to teach at Overton school, and we as kids used to bike to Ellesmere School on a Saturday to play football for the school team."*



Cyclists and cycle clubs on holiday would also visit the village. The shop *(picture right)* in High Street was a Bakers and Grocers in 1901 and was run by William Wright and his family. The sign outside the shop advertised "Refreshments and accommodation for cyclists".



This picture shows motorised cycles outside Church Cottage in the early 1900s. The thatched roof was lost in a fire in the 1930s.

There were cycle shops in the village, Mr. Wilf McDowell's bicycle shop in Penyllan Street (now the Vets); he lived across the road at Machine House. There was also Auguste Onckelinx's business at what is now the Corner Shop on the corner of High Street and Willow Street.



The picture left shows Frank Thompson and his sister Amy outside their cottage at Lightwood Green

Charabancs

Motor charabancs were used mainly for day trips before WWI and in the 1920s.



This is an excursion (probably to Rhyl) from Overton chapel with Tommy Thompson and Mr. Wainwright. Another photograph exists of the same charabanc with an excursion from St Mary's Church led by Rev Gilbert Heaton



Bill Roberts, (see left) uncle of Frank Lloyd ran a bus service with a charabanc before the 'Transport', see below. He then moved to Llandudno Junction

Buses

Memories of Mary Caspar in the 1930s



"There were two 'bus services', the Transport (later Crosville) and Williams and Hodson from Marchwiel whose depot stood next-door to the Post Office. The latter was the one on which I went to school in Wrexham. It really was an oddity. It was manned by two crews. One was a Miss Annie Hodson ("Annie Udson") and Albert, the driver who we believed to be Annie's illegitimate son and the other was a Mrs Williams, Annie's sister and another driver. Annie's crew was the one I travelled with the most.

I have two particular memories. Once, on the way to school, we stopped at the Ruabon road end and after about 5 minutes, Annie got off and walked up the Ruabon road for a quarter of a mile, and slowly back. She got on the 'bus again and said, "Well Albert, we shall have to go, but it's funny, Mrs Jones always comes of a Thursday."

Another time, it was my birthday and I told Annie it was. She said "How old are you?" I said, proudly, "I'm 13" and Annie said, "That will be full fare, then."

Williams & Hodson's route was Wrexham to Overton via Overton Bridge. Crosville route was Wrexham, Marchwiel, Bangor, Overton, Criftins, Elson Ellesmere station.

During WWII the passenger local railway line was closed to passengers as a wartime economy measure, but carried heavy munitions traffic. The buses were therefore even more important, and were the transport for many children to the secondary schools in Wrexham.

Taxis

Mary Caspar remembered "Journeys further afield almost always involved a train journey, and this usually started at Ruabon, or occasionally, Gobowen. There was no 'bus service to either station, as a taxi was necessary. This was either Onckelinx (Onky) or Tommy Thompson. If my memory serves me, the taxi fare for the five mile journey was 10/-."

Elizabeth Thompson ran a taxi service with a pony and trap before her son Tommy Thompson acquired vehicles.

Auguste Onckelinx, also ran a taxi service known locally as Onkys. The business was later moved to what was Wason's in Salop Road.

Frank Lloyd ran a taxi business from the late 1920s to the 1950s from Rose House and the yard of what is now Kiln Cottage in School Lane. (see pictures below) He had a bullnose Morris which was used for weddings and a Ford and later a Chrysler.



Petrol stations

There were petrol pumps at Onckelinx outside the right hand window on the High Street (see picture)

Tommy Thompson also had a petrol pump on Bangor Road.

In Salop Road "Dee View" in the 1920s was "the bottom shop" a general grocers of a good size and with a petrol pump in front of the house. It was run by Mr Frank Edwards who also ran a taxi.

Later the petrol station was enlarged by Joe Evans, known as "Esso Joe's", and a garage forecourt made to the right of the house. Mr Evans was helped by his sister Barbara,



Wasons garage business in Salop Road was set up by Auguste Onckelinx who moved his business here from what is now the Corner Shop in the High Street.

At first this was a wooden building with a galvanised workshop at the back. The present shop building replaced the wooden building in

1934. Wasons closed in March 2012, the end of petrol sales in the village.



Although this is probably a "set up" picture to show off the Co-ops delivery vehicles in Penyllan Street, delivery vehicles continue to fill the village streets to this day.