

Transport

Transport in and around the village has a long history. Baggage wagons supported the Roman legions as they marched along the road which forms the southern boundary, while farm carts brought supplies to the people of Silchester from the surrounding countryside. A by-road used by them probably became one of our oldest village streets. It is called 'The Dips' and it bisects St. Mary's and St. John's Roads on its way from Silchester via Manns Farm to Grazeley and beyond. It became one of the many roads and tracks which converged on the site of the Mortimer fairs, some of them used by drovers bringing animals for sale.

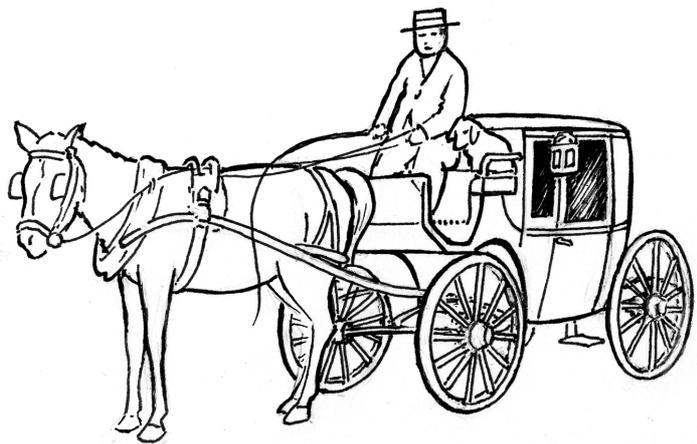
The Railway

The railway came to Mortimer in 1848 and within a few years cattle trucks were in use, at first for prize beasts only, but soon putting the drovers out of business. The railway was built to Brunel's broad gauge of seven feet and the platforms at Mortimer are consequently a long way apart. In 1856 it became mixed gauge until the third rail was removed in 1892.

Mortimer station was built to one of Brunel's standard chalet designs and is a grade II listed building. Its original pantiled roof was recreated during restoration in 1985, although since 1892 it had been slated. The railway brought most of the necessities of life to the station's extensive freight depot until it was swept away under the Beeching axe (the substantial contraction of the railway system that took place in the 1960s devised and administered by Lord Beeching as chairman of the British Railways Board).

Road Transport

Road transport was needed to convey goods and people up the hill, and all passenger trains were met by horse-cab. Coal merchants, builders and farmers collected their own supplies, but everything else was moved by the carriers' carts, successors to the cumbersome road wagons of the pre-railway age. Carriers ran from certain Reading public houses (such as The Sun in Castle Street and The Boar's Head in Friar Street) to rural railway stations, varying routes to suit delivery of goods, and sometimes passengers, and surviving into the diesel era.



Buses are generally regarded as the poor relation of trains but before nearly every family had a car they were essential to rural life. In the early 1930s Tadley buses ran through to Basingstoke and for a time several firms were in competition. The British Bus Company,

Keeps and Thames Valley buses raced each other and fares were cut until one could buy a return ticket to Reading for less than a shilling.

No mention has been made of stage coaches as it is unlikely that Mortimer ever saw any. They used the turnpike roads, the nearest of which ran from Basingstoke to Reading (now A33) and to Aldermaston (A340).

The railways killed off the coaching trade as quickly as it had the drovers', but the well-to-do country gentlemen continued to use horse carriages, although in decreasing numbers, and village tradesmen were slow to abandon the horse-drawn milk floats, bread vans and coal carts that were once a common sight.

