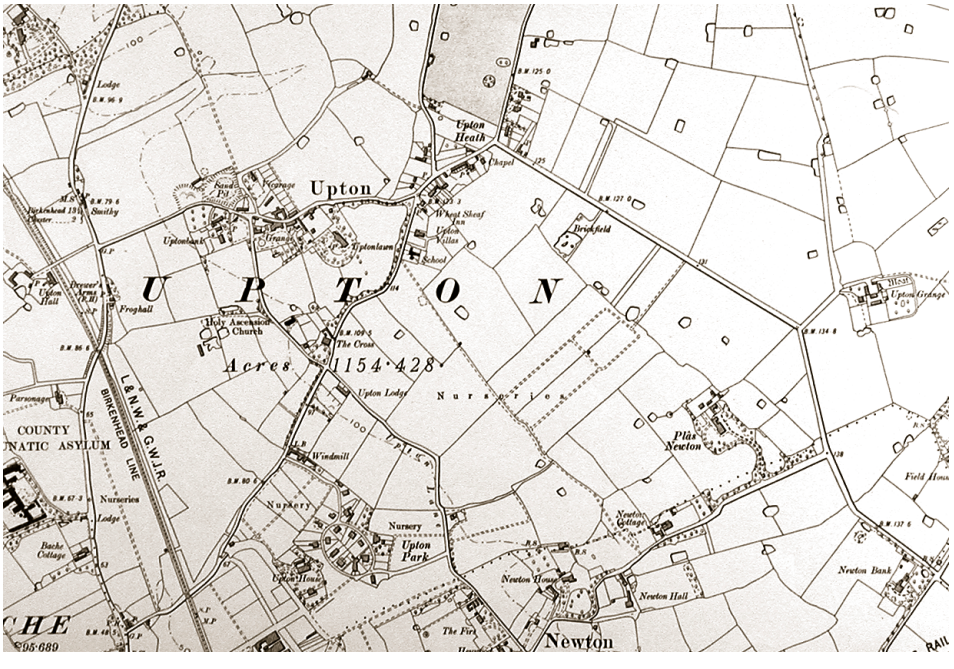
Chapter 10
Traffic

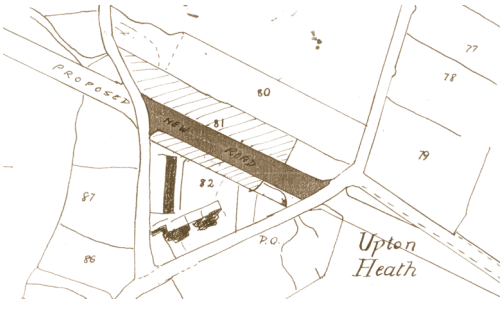
Growth of the traffic network – principally road and rail – not only provided easier access between the main centres of population but also put Upton within easier reach and as traffic grew placed a greater strain on our village lanes. Greater accessibility increased the desire to live here while working elsewhere. Although few in number, Upton businesses were able to trade more easily and further afield. The increase in traffic had a big impact on the rural village with speeding vehicles and dust creation on narrow, winding, unmetalled, country lanes. Amongst the changes would have been the arrival of newspapers on the day of publication and a daily mail collection and delivery service. The year 1851 saw the laying of a telegraph line alongside the railway, not just for railway use. It is not known if and when any Upton residents made use of this service. After 1939, the local halt at Upton, no doubt, encouraged the speculative building of houses for commuters.



This map, reproduced from the 1898 Ordnance Survey Map, shows how the railway cut through the drive to Upton Hall but skirted Bache pool. The roads within Upton were merely narrow lanes and with no Moston Road the village suffered with much through road traffic.

The Main Road network

The Chester – Birkenhead road (Liverpool Road) through the Bache was turnpiked in 1787, with a tollhouse near its later junction with the present A41 at Moston and possibly another at the Bache. Prior to 1787 most of the goods would have been carried by packhorses and although the number of wagons increased, they generally averaged no more than 2.5 m.p.h. The stretch of Liverpool Road from the Bache to the Frog public house was made into a dual carriageway in 1968, with land being taken from the hospital side for the widening. Further north the line of the road seems to have been governed by the existing buildings, although some of the site of the former Brewers Arms now appears to be under the southbound carriageway, in front of The Frog public house.



Upton's missing road link – from Long Lane to Moston – was proposed in the late 1920s. Shown here is the length from Caughall Road to Flag Lane and although the Institute is not shown on this sketch it was the reason for diverting the end of Long Lane and consequently creating the wide road at that point. It was constructed between 1931 and 1933. Prior to that, traffic coming along Long Lane would have had to turn into Heath Road and use Upton Lane to get to Liverpool Road and then continue onto Birkenhead. It was planned to make Wealstone Lane, formerly called Upton Lane, into a wide distributor road, generally of the same width as at its junction with Plas Newton Lane. This plan was dropped in the late 1970s. Plas Newton Lane, once winding around Newton Hall, was straightened and widened post-WW2. Numerous junctions have been widened – at Upton Cross this required moving the war memorial back in the late 1950s having previously taken 20feet from Upton Lodge, courtesy of the War Office. Probably the latest major roadworks was in 1992 for Countess Way which required major landraising and loss of a popular 'wild play' venue for local children.

Following WW1, traffic around and through Upton increased dramatically. Lorries returning from the war were adopted by various carriers mixing with traditional horse and cart. The more affluent moving into the area had their cars and this mix led to many accidents on Upton's narrow lanes and blind junctions. The local Council was frequently discussing the problems and acquiring land to widen roads and junctions. Traffic surveys conducted on the Chester – Birkenhead traffic passing through the Bache showed increases from around 3,500 vehicles per day in 1922 to over 8,000 by 1928 despite the improvements to roads around Queensferry meaning travellers to Wales did not have to come through Chester. After the Moston Road opened, the increased traffic caused such concern that by 1939 the Upton Ratepayers Association was calling for a bypass and this was incorporated in post-war plans (see page 120). The A41 dual carriageway near

Duttons Lane and the wider road north of Moston were seemingly part of plans to bypass up around the Zoo. See the 1945 Cheshire County proposal (page 120). In 1970 when planning the M53, proposals were made to terminate the motorway at the Duttons Lane/Long Lane junction, rather than off the Hoole roundabout. Well before all this, a proposal was made in the 1920s for a toll motorway between Birmingham and the Mersey running through Picton Gorse.

From Stage Coach to the Crosville Bus Service

It appears that in 1762 there were three stagecoach services per week, on alternate days, between Chester and Woodside, connecting with the ferry to Liverpool. It is thought that these services may have used the Liverpool Road route. By 1837 it was claimed by the promoters of the railway, that there were 22 coaches per day between Chester and Birkenhead, carrying an estimated 2,715 passengers per week. In addition a further 799 passengers made the journey in other 'cars'. In a last stand against the railway, 1840 saw a race between coach and train running from Tranmere to Chester. Despite being given a one-hour start, the coach lost.

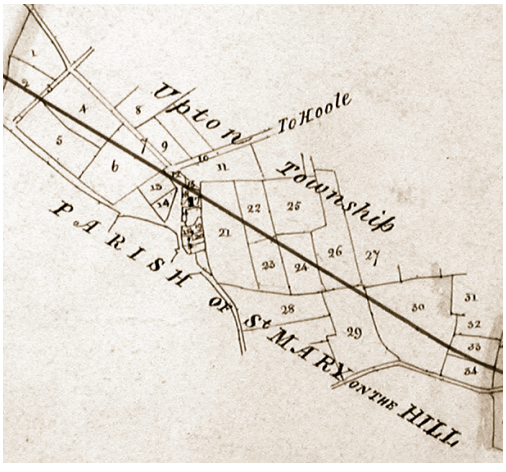
From 1911 the Crossville Motor Company started routes running north from Chester passing through the Bache. The high cost annoyed local people but Crosville claimed they were taking seats from longer distance travellers leaving Chester. Direct services to Upton commenced in 1921 and by the late 1920s were running special late night services (2.00a.m.) to assist with Village Hall functions.

In the early 1990s the Park and Ride site was opened at the Zoo. Buses avoided the centre of Upton by travelling via Liverpool Road. An earlier plan for this scheme evisaged a tram service along Longlane to the disused Mickle Trafford railway line and then into the City.

Canals

The Wirral Line of the Shropshire Union Canal around Upton was originally part of a scheme to link the rivers Severn and Mersey, crossing the River Dee close to Crane Wharf. The section around Upton was begun in November 1793 and was in use by July 1795. Passenger and goods carrying on this part of the canal flourished. By 1810 'Express fly' passenger boats could carry up to 200 passengers, who could purchase, tea, coffee and refreshments on board. Tipping was forbidden.

Smaller vessels ran pleasure cruises along the canal for the same fares. Passenger services ended about the time of the opening of the railway. The cargo trade was however still buoyant with over 60,000 tons of iron alone being carried in 1838 before seeing a steady decline. By the mid 1930s it was much reduced and barges could not carry a full cargo due to the lack of dredging and maintenance.



The canals as built, did not have a big impact on Upton but other proposals if adopted would have transformed it. The 1833 proposal shown here would have run through Upton Heath – through our current traffic light cross roads – on through the post-war Warrington's housing developments. Shortly before this in 1824 a proposal was submitted for a large ship canal linking the Dee with the Manchester, skirting north of the zoo. Finally as late as 1907 the Waverton Stoak Canal was proposed crossing the east of the parish. Today our only canal circling west and north offers a leisure route for boat, cycle and pedestrian.

Railways

The Chester & Birkenhead Railway Company was incorporated in 1837, with work commencing in May 1838. The Southern Section, from Moston to Chester, measured 5 miles 37 chains and the terrain made the works relatively simple. The major local task was the construction of the viaduct over the canal, at Moston. As the pace of work increased so did the workforce, which would have had to be accommodated locally. By April 1839, 447 men and 32 horses were employed on the Southern Section, increasing to 900 men and 40 horses by October. The final cost of the railway was over twice the original estimate.

For the construction of the line, Mill Lane had to be excavated a further two feet to allow vehicles to pass beneath the railway, whilst the "Turnpike" (Liverpool Road) had to be raised by 18 feet to pass over the track. Culverts were also required for Flookers Brook and the brook that flowed roughly along the line of Neston Drive and Ellesmere Avenue.

The Official Opening of the line was on 23rd September 1840 and saw the locomotive 'The Wirral' make the 50-minute journey to a temporary station in Brook Street, Chester. Initially the line was single track, but by 1847 much of the route had been doubled. Such was the growth in traffic that by 1902 four tracks were required, but the cost of duplicating the Moston Viaduct was too great so widening works ended at Ledsham. If laid, the extra tracks would have been to the west of the existing line, taking the land now occupied by the houses on the eastern side of Upton Drive as well as part of the site now occupied by the supermarket.

Only basic facilities were provided at intermediate stations. Amongst these was a cottage at the station, in Station Road, Mollington, which served Upton for many years. Upton obtained its own station when a halt was opened on 17th July 1939.



Upton Halt shown here c1970 was immediately to the south of the bridge where Liverpool Road passes over the line. Mrs. Bowker is remembered as the ticket collector for many years. The site was cramped and on the 9th January 1984 the new station at the Bache replaced it. The land used by the new station, and the adjoining supermarket, had previously been the local goods yard.

By 1885 about 22 passenger trains, ran from Chester to Birkenhead each day. There were many more goods trains than passenger trains. By 1890 about 27, coal trains, consisting of 20-25 eight-ton wagons, passed through Upton, each day. Other goods trains would be carrying manufactured goods, fertiliser, grain, flour and iron ore, from Birkenhead, with building materials and manufactured goods going the other way. Perhaps 190 trains a day passed through at this time. In the 1890s much of the GWR coal traffic was lost to coastal ships, which made the carriage of more parochial goods of greater significance and led to the opening of a small goods yard, at the Bache, on the 17th July 1911. The yard remained open for general goods until 2nd June 1969, and as a coal yard until 14th May 1972. As well as domestic coal, the goods yard would have imported building materials and exported farm and nursery produce. For a while, it appears the mail train also stopped here.



The entrance to the goods yard, off Mill Lane – photo early 1960s



A Chester bound steam train approaching Upton Halt about 1950

In the 19th Century there were several proposals for railways through Upton. These included - the Birmingham / Mersey Railway – proposed in 1824; the Chester Junction Railway - proposed in 1836 and the Birkenhead / Lancashire and Chester Junction Railway – proposed in 1844.

Running north to south these routes would have run where we now know as -

1824

Park & Ride Car Park;
Demage Lane;
East of Upton Lawns;
Gatesheath Drive;
Junction of Weston Grove with Wealstone Lane;
Mill View School;
City Branch (west of the Firs School);
Birmingham Branch (through Kingsway High School).

1836

St Christopher's Close;
Across the golf course;
Mill Lane/Delvine Drive junction;
Bache Drive;
The Wiend.

1844

Park & Ride Car Park;
NorthWest of Daleside;
Then 1836 route to join existing line close to The Wiend.

In the 1920s or 1930s, there may also have been a proposal to construct a commuter railway from the bridge over Mill Lane, towards the centre of the village. The route appears to have been along the northern edge of Mill Lane then to the rear of the houses. The length of the track is not known but it appears that the owner of the Cockpit refused to sell, causing the plan not to proceed.

Air

For the last few decades Upton has benefited from the proximity of two regional airports – Manchester Ringway and Liverpool Speke – both of which have developed in stages from the 1930s. However in the late 1920s, proposals were considered that could have made Upton to Chester like Speke, today, is to Liverpool.

The Chester Municipal Aeropark – on a 271 acre site bordered by Duttons Lane, Acres Lane, Caughall Road and Long Lane - was proposed 1929-31. Amongst the reasons put forward by Councillors for rejecting the plan were, that '*the imminent achievement of world peace would release RAF Sealand for civil use and that flying would never prove economic*'. Supporters of the aeropark still wanted the site acquired, just in case, claiming that if the proposal did not ultimately go ahead the land could be sold at a profit, particularly when the ring road was completed. Alternatively it could even have been used as a site for a Municipal Mental Hospital. Another major concern of the Council was the location of the water tower, then being planned. Chester Waterworks Company indicated that they would be willing to change the site of the tower to the junction of Duttons Lane and Long Lane if required.



Even though the aeropark was not built, air displays took place on the site in 1931 and 1933 featuring the Sir Alan Cobham Flying Circus. Amongst the various type of aircraft displayed were autogiros, a predecessor of the helicopter (shown here).

There were other notable aviation events in this period including a visit by the ill fated airship R101, which flew over Chester at 11.45am on 19th November 1929. It approached the city at about 1200 feet flying along Parkgate Road and in July 1932 the German airship Graff Zeppelin flew towards the city along Liverpool Road.

Much of the research for this chapter has been undertaken by Tony Barratt.