

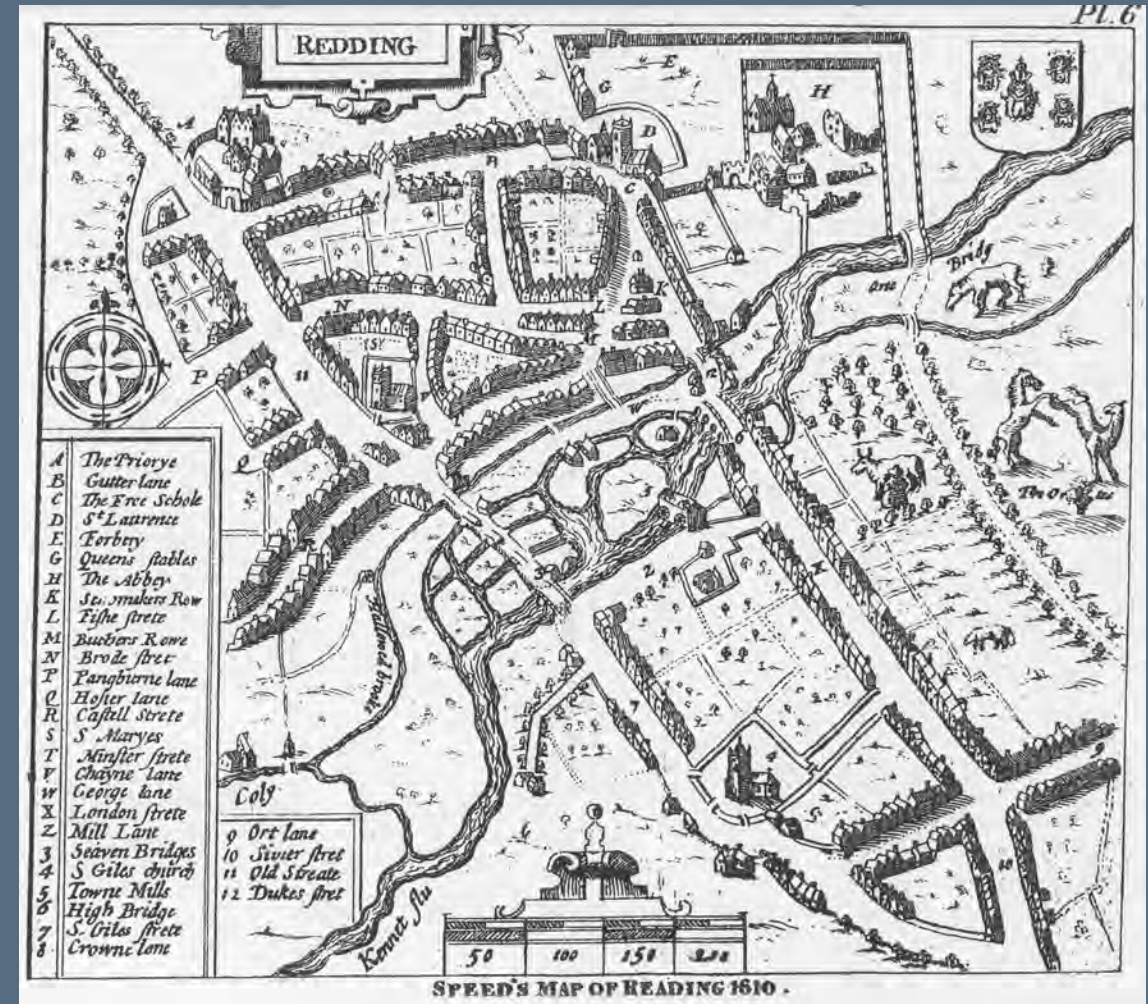


Oxford Road Transport

Roads

Reading's position on the main road between London and Bath was central to its economic growth. After Queen Anne visited the spa town in 1702 'taking the waters' at Bath became popular and fashionable for the wealthy. Stagecoach services on the London-Bath road stopped at Reading and inns such as the Angel, Broad Face, George and Saracen's Head flourished. By 1840 there were 110 inns in Reading. They provided food and accommodation for travellers and venues for social and political meetings, dinners and entertainments for people living in Reading. The George, the Turk's Head and the Sun are still trading today. The volume of coach traffic hinted at the future growth of commuter traffic. It was observed that the new coach services enabled 'the Reading man who leaves home in the morning to transact what business he may have to do in London and to return the same evening'.

Road journeys remained slow, cold and uncomfortable. The cost of travel by coach to London from Reading was around 8 shillings, more than an average week's wage. Frequent roadside robberies made this form of transport increasingly perilous. These factors combined to have negative impact on Reading's trade and industry in the decades before the arrival of the railway.



Horse and Carriage

This image depicts Reading's bustling Market Place. Until the 12th century the market was originally situated near St Mary's Church further to the west. However, under the commands of the Abbot the market was moved closer to the Abbey and its main Gate. The presence of horses and carriages can be seen taking people from Reading to Oxford, where we see the bus stops today!

Local farmers are portrayed using wagons (4 wheels) or carts (2 wheels) to bring corn which was sold in the open market. St Laurence's church can be seen in the background standing tall above the other buildings. In the centre of the image is the Simeon Monument designed by the well-known architect Sir John Soane who was educated in Reading.



Horse drawn trams

In 1879, the first horse-drawn tram set off along Oxford Road.

During the nineteenth century the population of Reading grew dramatically from 10,000 in the early 1800s to 70,000 by 1900. Industry developed and the suburbs expanded and so a horse-drawn tram service was introduced in 1879 to provide a reliable transport link for the residents of Reading.



Electric Trams

A crowd surrounds electric tram car no.1, decorated for the Mayor of Reading, Alderman A.H. Bull, on the first day of operation on 22 July 1903. This photograph was taken in Broad Street outside Wellsteeds department store (now The Oracle) and there is a Blandy and Hawkins brewery dray in the foreground. The postcard was produced by Jenkins of London Street, Reading.

Horse drawn trams had been operated by the Reading Tramways Company since 1879 along Oxford Road, Broad Street and King's Road. In 1901 Reading Corporation Tramways took over the private operator and they quickly set about modernising and improving the service with new routes and electrification. A new tram depot and power station was built on Mill Lane. The electric trams were replaced by trolley buses in 1939.



Model of Reading tram

Reading Corporation bought thirty of these four-wheeled trams to open the electric tram system in 1903. They were used until the last tram ran in 1939. Six much larger trams were bought in 1904 and ran until 1936. The driver had to stand at the controls in all weathers. It was hard work and the basic working week was 65 hours. Only in later years were some trams rebuilt with vestibule ends to provide protection.



The last of the trams

All Reading's trams were rebuilt at Mill Lane depot between 1920 and 1929. This plaque was carried on the lower deck of tram no. 13. It was the last tram to run in Reading, from the Oxford Road terminus to Mill Lane depot on 20 May 1939. VIPs on the last journey included the Mayor, William McIlroy, who drove it for some of the way. William McIlroy owned a department store in Oxford Road and donated the land which is now McIlroy Park to the town.

Tramlines removed

Work began in August 1959 to remove the well-known tramlines and stone sets on Caversham Road in Reading. A huge crane was employed to tear the tramlines out of the ground. The first trams in Reading were horse drawn and opened in 1879. In 1903 the system was extended and converted to electric power. In 1939 the trams were replaced by motor buses and trolley buses. By 1967 Reading Corporation decided to abandon the trolleybus system, and the routes were phased out, closing finally in November 1968.



Trams and trolley busses

Horse-drawn buses were to be found in some English towns and cities from early in the nineteenth century, and Britain's first trams (again horse-drawn) appeared in Birkenhead in 1860. Reading got its first trams in 1879. They ran from Cemetery Junction to Brock Barracks on the Oxford Road, roughly the 2 ½ mile route operated today by the 17 bus service. Plans for a second north-south service (Caversham to Whitley) had to be shelved, following objections from interests in Caversham.

Trolley busses

Trolleybuses are powered by electricity taken from overhead wires. The spacer bar is used to keep the positive and negative wires apart.

Trolleybuses run on rubber tyres, unlike trams, which use rails. Trams only have one overhead wire and they return the current through the rails.



Fierce competition

There was fierce competition between the Tram Company and independent bus operators from the start, with speeding, reckless overtaking and numerous accidents. But none of the services could claim to be exactly mass transport - the tram company's initial fleet of vehicles consisted of just seven 24-seater cars. The Council soon developed an ambition to have a service that was more comprehensive, electric powered and council-owned and operated, and the Tramways Act 1870 gave them the powers to set one up. The streets of Reading were packed on 22 July 1903 to see this new technological marvel inaugurated.

Trolley busses take the lead

The tram service ran for over thirty years, though it was slow (16 m.p.h.), relatively inflexible and passengers trying to get to and from the pavement to the tramcar in the middle of the road sometimes took their life into their own hands. By 1929/30 the trams carried 12,225,100 passengers in a year, but by now most of the fleet was in urgent need of renewal, and the Council chose to replace them with a mixture of electric trolley buses and petrol buses. The scheme was not universally welcomed - in particular, the prospect of desirable residential streets being strung with a multitude of cables and posts did not go down well. Nevertheless, the trolley buses were gradually introduced, and on 20 May 1939 Reading's last tram ran down the Oxford Road with the Mayor at the controls.

Wartime transport

Public transport served the town through the privations of the Second World War although, even in daytime, it was hard for visitors to know where a Reading bus was bound, since the destination boards were all changed, so as to confuse any enemy spy thinking of travelling on them.

Post war transport

The post-war years were a time when most operators were dispensing with trolley buses, in favour of diesel buses, but Reading bucked the trend and continued adding to its network (albeit in a small way) into the 1950s. When in November 1968 Reading did finally dispense with its trolley bus fleet, it was one of the last six operators in the country to do so. The final services attracted not just crowds of local people but also sentimental trolley bus enthusiasts from around the country.

Tram track removed from Oxford Road

At the end of the Second World War some long outstanding road repairs could be carried out. Staff were returning to work and materials were becoming available.

Here on the Oxford Road, Reading, looking towards Brock Barracks, tram track was taken up at the beginning of 1946. The last trams had run in Reading in 1939 and had been replaced by the trolley buses as in this photograph.



Busses

By 1965, most UK trolleybus systems had closed, and the manufacturers of the overhead equipment gave notice that they would cease production.

At the same time the trolleybuses were criticised in the local press because they cost more to operate than motor buses and were inflexible, even though the trolleybuses were profitable (Reading's motor buses made a loss), faster and less polluting.

Reading Corporation decided to abandon the trolleybus system, and the routes were phased out between January 1967 and November 1968.

Motorbuses were brought in as the trolley buses were being removed from service.



Bus Accidents

An unfortunate incident occurred at the junction of Oxford Road and Cranborne Gardens on 27 March 1952.

The driver of AEC 126 was approaching the nearby bus stop but instead of putting his foot on the brake he accidentally depressed the accelerator. The vehicle's front wheel hit the kerb and forced the steering to the left, following which it collided with a traction pole and overturned.

Fortunately, there were only three people who incurred minor injuries. The vehicle itself was found to have a twisted chassis and never saw service again.



Women employed in transport

The first conductress to be employed by Thames Valley Buses. During the Second World War, men abandoned their jobs to fight in the British Army, this provided many women with employment opportunities.



Railways

A photograph of the tank engine used to bring coal and timber trains and take out biscuit trains from Huntley & Palmers.

As production at the factory increased from the 1860s, most of the output was distributed by rail. The purchase of more land next to the factory in 1873 enabled Huntley & Palmers to construct their own private sidings within the factory site and also to build a small two-road locomotive shed at the north-east corner of the site. The engine driver holding the oil can is Henry Tollervey (1855-1943). Photograph by Universal Studios of Oxford Road, Reading.



Railways

The Great Western Railway reached Reading in 1840. The Berks & Hants Railway line passing through Reading West station was opened in 1847, although the station itself didn't open until 1906.

The railway and the bridge were placed at a distance from the edge of town which was then near to Prospect Street. The railway bridge divides the eastern end of the Oxford Road where the properties are a mix of Georgian and early Victorian building from the more commercial, largely late Victorian and Edwardian shops further to the west.

The original 1840s brick arch of Reading West bridge was replaced in the 1930s to provide greater head clearance. Until then, top-deck tram passengers were instructed to 'Keep your seats' so not to lose their heads!



Railways

A group of Reading women waiting for a train at Reading West Station. They were about to embark on a trip to America as part of a two-part exchange. Later in 1950, women from America travelled to Reading.

After the Second World War, it became particularly important to create positive bonds of friendship between countries in an effort to build bridges and keep future peace.



Cars

A car accident which occurred on Oxford Road, Reading. The photograph is taken from the Reading Chronicle archives, July 1939.

We don't have any more information regarding the incident, except that we can see in the photograph that cars were running on small cobbled streets at that time.

Driving cars was becoming more popular but not many people could afford them. For many people on Oxford Road, public transport was a vital resource to access work.



Cars and trolley busses

A car driven by 60-year-old Mrs Esther Neville Smith of Friars Acre, North Lancing, Sussex, collided with a trolley-bus standard on the Oxford Road, Reading, on 3 May 1955. Mrs Smith was taken to Battle Hospital where she was pronounced dead. No other vehicle was involved.



Motorbikes

Women took on new roles in the Second World War including as dispatch riders. This service was operated by the Southern Regional Headquarters which was based in Reading by 1941.

The Motor Transport Corps started in February 1939 with 20 drivers and by early 1941 had 2,000 and was about to recruit in Reading.



Activity 1: How has transport affected Oxford Road?

Read through the different forms of transport in this activity. Based on what you've read and the pictures you see, answer the following questions:

- Which form of transport do you think made the most difference to Oxford Road?
- Explain Why?
- Which form of transport do you feel was the safest?
- Why?
- Which do you feel was the most dangerous?
- Why?
- What transport would like to see on Oxford Road in the future?
- Explain why?

Activity 2: Designing transport of the future!

We are asking you to design the perfect form of transport for Oxford Road.

Think about the following questions to help you design a form of transport completely suited to Oxford Road:

- How wide is Oxford Road?
- Do you feel a lot of people live on or near Oxford Road?
- Where do you think the most popular locations are on Oxford Road?
- How wide are the pavements on Oxford Road?
- How fast do people travel on Oxford Road?
- Will people spend long on your transport?
- Will passengers sit or stand?
- Should the transport travel on the road?
- Will it need a person to operate it?

Activity 3: Design a route for your transport!

Using the Streets of Oxford Road and Buildings of Oxford Road resource, create a route for your chosen or your own design of transport!

You have lots of ways to show your route:

- Use photographs from the Oxford Road to make a travel guide/collage
- Draw where your chosen transport stops on a map of Oxford Road
- Create a timetable for your chosen transport (include weekends!)
- Create a storyboard/animation/video of your transport stopping at different locations and letting people on and off!
- Create an audio guide recording of your where chosen form of transport will stop on Oxford Road

