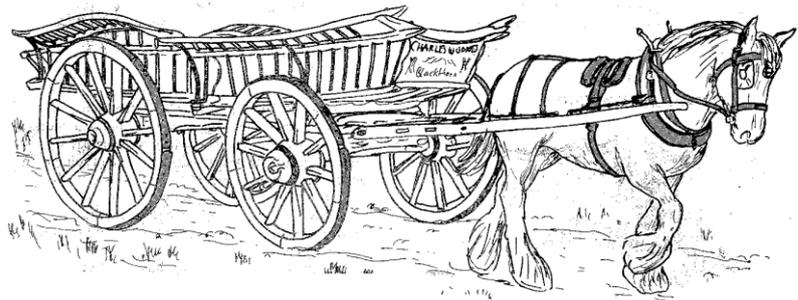


3I Tale of the Waggoner

I'm Fred Jarvis. I used to work here with my wagon and horse, taking the ore to be smelted, and bringing back coal for the boilers at the mine. I don't know why they wanted this railway. We've always done the work, and there were no complaints. A good horse can pull a ton and a half down the hill to Pontesbury, and a ton back up the hill to the mine. That ought to be enough. We used to produce 3,000 tons of lead a year. It sounds a lot if you put it all together. But there are a lot of working days in a year. Let's make it simple: fifty weeks, six days a week, and that's 300 working days. You don't have to work on Sundays, and if the weather's bad in winter, you can miss a day or two. Now this is easy – one ton a load, 3,000 tons a year, 300 working days. That's just ten wagon loads a day. It's four miles each way so we can do it twice in winter and three times in summer if there's plenty of ore. Who needs a railway? All you need is a good horse.

And there's no risk. I supply the horse. I supply the wagon. All the mine does is pay for transport – 5 percent of the value of the load. Everyone knows where they stand. I don't have any time for these big wagons pulled by more horses. You see, two horses never really pull together. They can only pull half as much again as one horse. Four horses are a waste of space. You can never turn them round in the yard. One horse, one wagon, and you're in business. A lot better business than railways.

Now, this railway needs capital. It needs money, and shares, and a new company to run it, and accountants and lawyers and an Act of Parliament to let them build it. Then there's a surveyor for the line, navvies to level the route, plate layers to put in the track, engines and wagons to buy. It will cost a fortune and everyone wants their money back double quick, so it really won't be any cheaper.



Well, they thought they knew best. They put it off and put it off for more than sixty years. If they'd wanted a railway they should have done it years ago, but now we've got this silly little thing that hardly goes anywhere and doesn't connect with anywhere else because it's the wrong gauge. Well, I knew they were wrong, but they didn't listen to me and ten years after the railway opened, the mine closed. That's right. They couldn't afford to pay anyone because the price of lead was too low. Everyone got laid off, and the railway got no money.

And me? I've still got the wagon, and I make a living. With these miners being laid off there are people moving here and there to find work, and guess who moves them? That's right, I do. It's casual work, but there's plenty of it. I have my horse and he goes where the railways can't go. I reckon there will always be work for a good man and a wagon, don't you?