

Pen and Parsimony: Carriages in the Novels of Jane Austen

By Sandy Lerner

Early in 1994, I bought a pair of English Shire horses and, at the suggestion of the trainer, I bought a carriage. With this seemingly unrelated act, I entered the world that was to bring me much closer (in this very small area of study) to Austen and the language that she used to convey intentional, pointed observations defining social distinction, character, and financial status. Austen doesn't concern herself with titled characters, so rank and fortune is not so easily distinguished in her writing. No, she conveys this information in language: small, precise bits of description, words that might not be there, but which—by being included—serve as discriminators. These touchstone nouns or phrases with which Austen assumed, rightfully in her time, she could establish character through an almost-constant stream of social nuance, conveyed within her very deft and precise use of language.

The first version of this paper was presented to the Stanford University Jane Austen Society in late 1994. The title of the paper references the paper's thesis: Lerner's Theory of Austen. This theory postulates that we really don't understand the words in the novels: we get a general feeling of what Austen meant to convey, but we don't get the nuance that is contained in a few very deliberate words that have lost much of their meaning and all of their context today. Having an extraordinarily low level of tolerance for cognitive dissonance, when I read (and re-read...) the novels, I felt that I wasn't really understanding the point, or the word placement felt awkward—just some nagging, unresolved, badly focused mental image would bother me, but I blithely read on. It was only when I knew enough to see beyond the general term “carriage” that these very particular, highly specific nouns and phrases began to be illuminating rather than anachronistic and nebulous.

Vehicles of one type or another are mentioned in the novels 394 times, including both generic and specific terms. I think it's fair to say that this is not oversight or filler, especially of an author renowned for her very scrupulous and precise use of the English language. I could not find—in nearly 400 examples—*any* place where she had been careless and, at any rate, she's not likely to have been careless 400 times. My research into the various references to vehicles mentioned in the six novels revolutionized my understanding of Austen's writing; re-reading within the paradigm of Lerner's Theory of (Not) Understanding Austen invariably, consistently helps to clarify and enlighten.

Interestingly, the generic “carriage” accounts for about half the references: 218 out of 394. Alternatively, if one re-reads passages that refer to a specific type of carriage, substituting a parallel model of modern automobile, for example, “Rolls-Royce” instead of “barouche,” or “Corniche” instead of “barouche-landau,” you will

start to see the social context; only then is it apparent that Austen is not really writing about vehicles, but is making a specific reference to the speaker's character, social standing and respectability. It makes much more sense to read these specific terms as not describing the vehicle, but as elucidative accessory to understanding her portrayal of the person speaking or described. Or, to put it succinctly, about half the time when Austen uses a general term for "carriage," she is talking about travelling; the other half of the time, she's talking about something else. Today, for many classes of specific nouns or phrases, we have no idea what that is.¹



Figure 1

If one sees Jane Austen as essentially anti-aristocracy (or at least the badly behaved ones), that she is derisive of aristocrats who have no just claim to the title except by birth, these touch-words are paramount to revealing her censure; for example, Lady Catherine (“...as Dawson does not object to the barouche box, there will be very good room for one of you...”),² and her deprecating introductory treatment of Sir Walter Elliot. She uses the acquisition of carriages as a way of elevating persons of merit--such as Capt. Wentworth--into this exclusive enclave of people who *earn* vehicles; Austen is, in effect, creating a parallel meritocracy by endowing those characters who rise into the lofty sphere of heroes or heroines with these

¹ A non-carriage example using food, from *Pride and Prejudice*: “No, she would go home. I fancy she was wanted about the mince-pies.” (Chapter 9) Why mince-pies? Why not the generic phrase, “dinner”? Because with the use of the specific term, Austen conveys (1) Mrs. Bennet is not reasonable—the ultimate Age of Reason epithet—a man who had made enough of a fortune in trade to rise to a knighthood would not be feeding his family *used* food. In the Regency period, mince-pies were made up of left-overs, hence the term “mince”; (2) through the use of this example, Mrs. Bennet tries to one-up the Lucases, but makes herself absurd; and, (3) we are allowed a small glimpse into the financial disaster to come: “If she (Charlotte Lucas Collins) is half as sharp as her mother, she is saving enough.” (Chapter 40) And, Mr. Bennet had often wished...he had laid by an annual sum for the better provision of his children, and of his wife... Had he done his duty I that respect, Lydia need not have been indebted to her uncle for whatever of honour or credit could be purchased for her...” (Chapter 50) Mrs. Bennet had no turn for economy...”¹ Using a generic term for *food* would have yielded none of the above.

² *Ibid.*, Chapter 37. Lady Catherine has a barouche, *not* a barouche-landau which would have seated four adults comfortably, and she is offering to take *one* of the girls. What happens to the other one? And, she is subjecting both women's plans to the unpredictability of the weather. She wants her barouche in town, and is not willing to take a larger coach to accommodate them. In the guise of generously offering them a comfortable ride to London, she is making a *conditional* offer, if it pleases her, and it might be one of them, or it might be both. The two women are expected to be grateful.

social trappings, formerly the exclusive province of the aristocracy. Alternately, she also uses vehicles as a way of exposing characters who use their possessions as a proxy for taste and respectability.

The first reference to any type of carriage occurs in *Sense and Sensibility* in Chapter 3. The reference turns on a fashionable equipage called a *barouche*, and “Mrs. John Dashwood “wished it likewise; but in the meanwhile, till one of these superior blessings could be attained, it would have quieted her ambition to see him driving a Barouche.”³

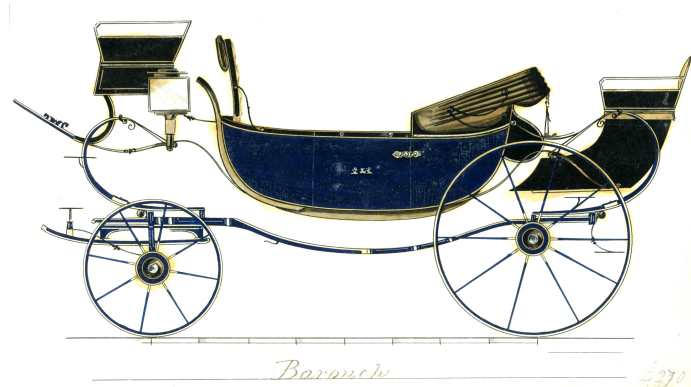


Figure 2

If you replace the word “barouche” in the above quote with the word “carriage,” the sentence simply makes no sense. Here’s that cognitive dissonance: it became clear to me that there was something else going on, something of a pattern that I could only describe as miscomprehension. The words fall into place *only* if you read assuming: when Austen uses a general term such as “carriage” or “house” or “gown”, that’s what she’s talking about. However, when she uses a *specific* noun--or a specifically qualified noun--such as “barouche” or “modern house” or “pearls,” she means to convey something quite different; this contextual meaning is often quite unrelated to the actual person or thing being described.

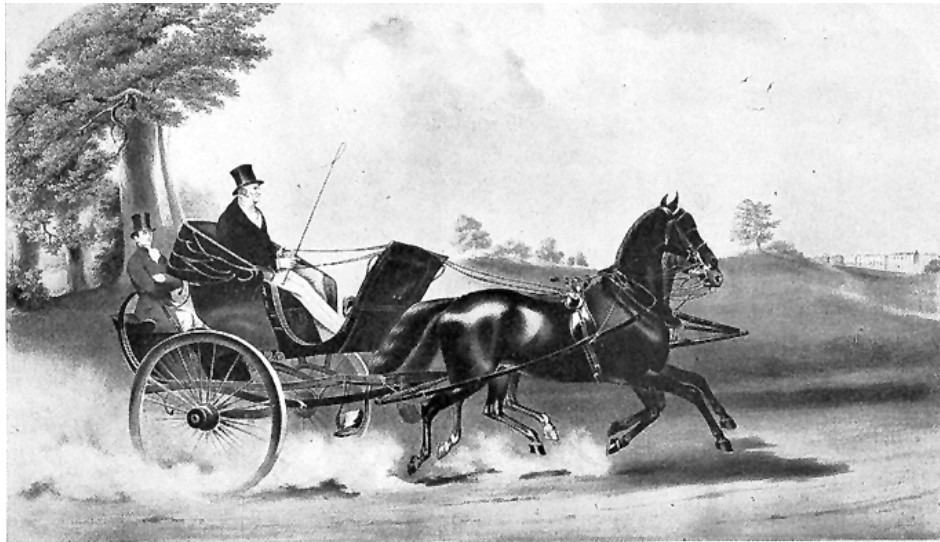
So, this language Austen uses--these tiny, parsimonious portraits—has the property that a specific word used to describe a person, place, or thing very likely denotes a meaning pregnant with semantic baggage; these linguistic chattels are no more nor no less the entire context of the social history of her time and place. The lexical luggage of “barouche” illuminates this seminal plot-setting, character-defining description of Mrs. Dashwood. We can read and understand Mr. Woodhouse’s “habits of gentle selfishness,”⁴ but fail utterly to comprehend—in one word—Mrs. Dashwood’s thoroughly shallow, materialistic, and callous world-view.

It is helpful to establish the contextual history of carriages in general. Very, very few people could afford to do anything but walk. This fact must moderate our un-

³ Jane Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, Chapter 3.

⁴ Jane Austen, *Emma*, Chapter 1.

derstanding in some sense, as when I say you should replace “barouche” for “Rolls-Royce,” it is deceptive; differences in the economic standing of the owner of one of those vehicles--by a percentage of society--is really much closer to today's percentage of people who own private airplanes. The wide distribution of a vast variety of consumer goods in modern times makes it even more important to impute a reasonable estimation of the contextual information that is carried by these specific nouns with respect to socio-economic status.



Geoffrey Bonnett Collection

Plate I. The Marquis of Anglesey driving his CURRICULE. See page 27

Man. Henry Graves

Figure 3

From the early 18th Century forward, the moneyed class in England became increasingly preoccupied with driving for sport. The very term *gentleman*, by the mid-18th Century, had come to encompass a superior ability to safely drive yourself, your passengers and your horses (John Thorpe—*not* a gentleman). Mr. Darcy drives a curricle--today's equivalent of a high-performance jet—not only an extremely expensive, flashy, and dangerous vehicle, but does so with a proficiency that requires Austen to note his bringing his sister in it to visit the Gardiners. Therefore, whether a vehicle was owner-driven only, may be owner driven, or was never owner-driven makes another dimension within the shorthand statement of a specific vehicle—and its owner.



Figure 4

Today we have no intuitive understanding of any particular vehicle, no intrinsic idea whether a particular vehicle mentioned has an attachment to a social or other indicators of taste or status: Was it used for town? Was it used in the country? Was it used for pleasure driving or daily transportation? Does the size of the vehicle, for example, denote ownership by gender in addition to economic status? All of the specific vehicles mentioned in the novels have these meanings attached to them. Another use of carriage denotation is that there were vehicles suitable only for women. We think now that only men drove, but that's simply not the case. There were (smaller) vehicles made uniquely for women driver-owners, such as the phaeton driven by Miss de Bourgh, as well as the phaeton Mrs. Gardiner has in mind for Mrs. Darcy. The ladies' pony phaeton was a familiar trope. Mrs. Wentworth has a *landaulet*: it is *her* landaulet, *her* car. This seriously trumps Mrs. Darcy's pony phaeton. Why?



Figure 5

The long 18th Century saw currency valuations that fluctuated dramatically. These rapid and unpredicted appreciations and depreciations applied vastly differently across the various areas of the country, to materials that were required, and on the labor component of cost throughout this time. The attachment to specific social status of different vehicles--in addition to the actual price of the vehicle--also carried enormous operational costs: the number of horses, their harness, servants and their livery required to properly “turn out” the vehicle, and the maintenance of servants, horses, and vehicles in town (e.g., London or Bath), costs that that would not have applied to someone living in a rural environment. In fact, the distinction between a *town* carriage and a *country* vehicle is paramount to the assignment of social class. These seemingly slender distinctions are requisite to understanding Austen’s assignment of character.



Figure 6

Jane Austen lived in a time of extremely rapid technical change that--even in modern times--is unparalleled. In terms of the change to daily life wrought by new technology, the period from roughly 1775 to 1835, it would take the following century to uproot whole societies to an equal degree. Austen's use of these specific nouns reflects her views on the transitions within English society that were a part of her time. In 1775, the year Jane Austen is born and the year of Iron Bridge, England is 70% rural and a land-based barter economy. Things, goods, and services were often paid by service in kind, in produce, or labor. There was a relatively small amount of cash compared to the value of goods and services within the British economy. By 1835, those percentages had reversed, and barter as a medium of exchange was effectively gone.

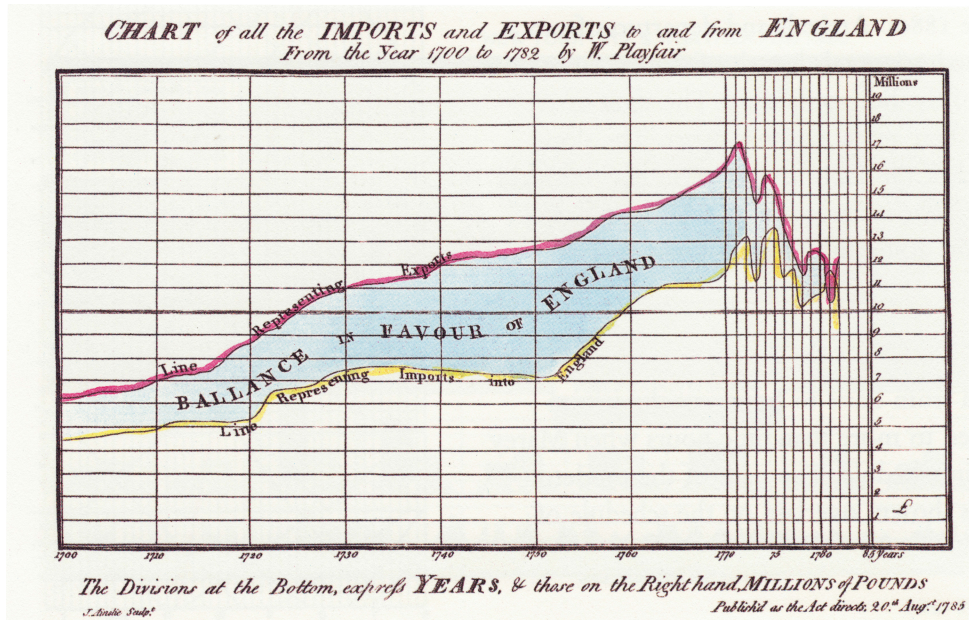


Figure 7

The rise of the cash economy came with the industrial revolution where rural commodities *in situ* were increasingly irrelevant. With this in mind, two other obfuscating issues must be overcome when we try to understand Austen's specific nouns. Firstly, depending on when she wrote the book and where people were living, the value of cash currency has remarkably little to do with other times and other places, even within the general context of Regency England; this is particularly true of the differences between the industrializing cities and the still-rural communities. The second is that, when analyzing prices within these fundamentally different economies, it's very clear that Austen had an extremely limited knowledge of the cash value of a few things, and none at all about everything else.

Certainly, there was no reason why an English gentlewoman living in the countryside at the turn of the 19th Century would properly have been concerned with the value of things in monetary terms. In fact, we see this contrast with Mrs. John Dashwood in the discussion with her husband about how much money her mother-in-law and daughters will have: "They will live so cheap! Their housekeeping will be nothing at all. They will have no carriage, no horses, and hardly any servants; they will keep no company, and can have no expenses of any kind! Only conceive how comfortable they will be!"⁵

There are other properties of vehicles that denote socio-economic status, taste, and even the intelligence of the possessor: how many horses are driven? Are they driven by a servant? Postillions? Are they post-horses? Are there out-riders? Who rides facing forward, and who is facing backwards? Who rides inside and who rides outside? What is the weather? Does the driver own a carriage, but no horses? Is the vehicle a hired one? Is it fitted out for travel? Is the carriage a *post* vehicle? Is the carriage appropriate for the number of passengers? The latter distinction comes up, for example, brilliantly in an exchange in *Sense and Sensibility* where Lucy Steele says that she and her sister shared a post-chaise⁶ (a hired, two-person vehicle) so that they were not quite paying their share to sit three-across—neither statement is something one would have said had one been a person of either refinement or intelligence.

Figure 8 is a diagram showing the various carriage modifiers:

⁵ Jane Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, Chapter 2. In addition to conveniently sending her husband's family into penury, Austen has Mrs. Dashwood using the specific phrase, "ten to one," showing that she is certainly ill-bred: her knowledge of low pursuits; talking at length upon matters of money; and, she is apparently quite familiar with cash accounting. These topics are unremarkable today, but in Jane Austen's time, a woman discoursing on money would have been regarded as vulgar in the extreme. Of course, we know immediately that Mrs. John Dashwood is heartless, unprincipled, and wholly mercenary; what we miss is the thorough illustration of *nouveau riche*—the effects of recently acquired wealth bringing people of inferior education, morals, and understanding into gentle society—her speeches illustrate, and that were so abhorrent to the established order.

⁶ Jane Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, Chapter 32.

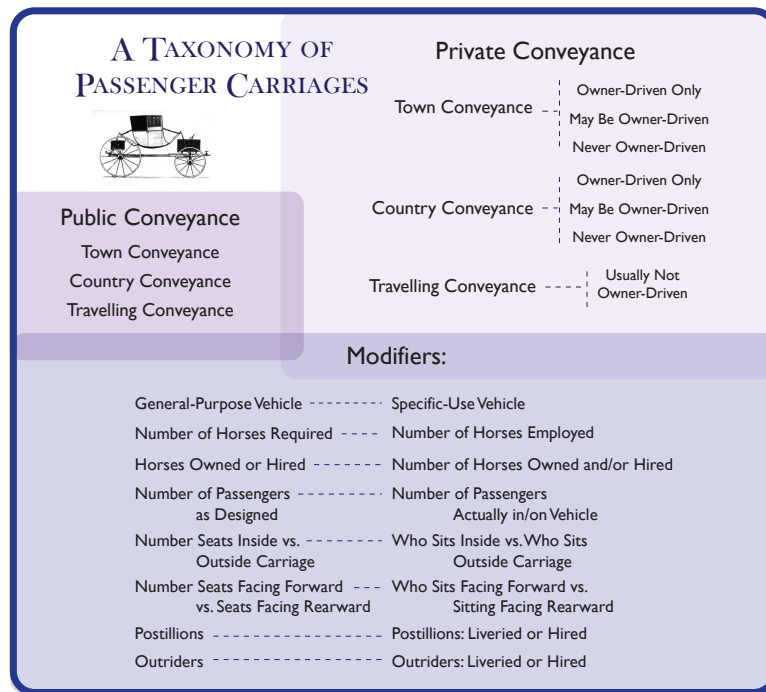


Figure 8

Before we get too far “down the road,” here's a brief timeline for carriages: a stage-coach first appears in Britain in the early 15th Century; a private travelling vehicle first appears in Hungary as a chattel in the mid-15th Century; by 1585, many of the English nobility and a few wealthy commoners own a carriage; by 1600 Britain and France had active small coach-building trades. In 1623 John Taylor writes:

“I think never such an as impudent, proud, sawcie Intruder or Encroacher came into the world as a Coach; for it hath driven many honest Families out of their Houses, many Knights to beggars, Corporations to poverty, Almese-deeds to all misdeeds, Hospitality to extortion, Plenty to famine, Humility to pride, Compassion to oppression, and all Earthly goodnes almost to an utter confusion.”⁷

Despite such censure, economic incentive led to the patent of the leaf-spring (a huge leap in travel comfort) in 1691. Within a few years, the first private turnpike road (1707) had been laid, and the English and French have already split what side the driver sits on; they never agree on anything again. In 1743, a patent for the first post-chaise carrying commercial traffic is granted; at about the same time, the use of steel for carriage springs enabled the speed of carriage to effectively double— from about 4 miles per hour to 8. These “Flying Coaches” could make the journey

⁷ John Taylor, *All the Workes of John Taylor, the Water Poet, Being 63 in Number, Collected Into One Volume by the Author with Sundry New Additions, Corrected, Revised, and Newly Imprinted*, n.d.

from Manchester to London in only four days! A trip from Cambridge to London took two days. In 1763 George III pays almost £8,000 for a single coach, enraging Horace Walpole. High-value possessions--such as carriages--are particularly subject to a loss of semantic baggage. As indicative of an emerging meritocracy, by 1794 a carriage is no longer exclusively the privilege of the titled:⁸

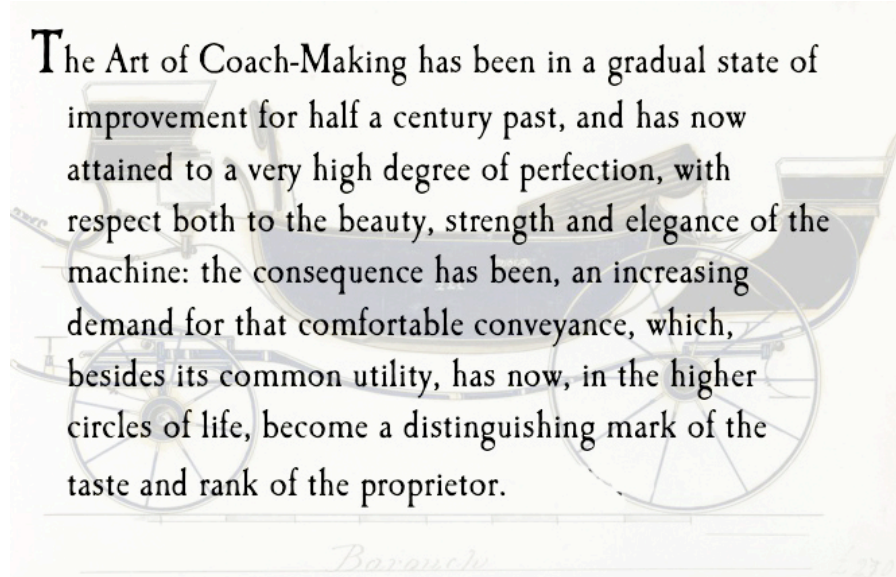


Figure 9

Austen would have known of Britain's place of prominence in travel technology. Driven by the industrial revolution, the need for increasingly rapid movement of goods and payments--and the cash generated by this merchant-based economy--the quality of roads in Britain far outstripped any other contemporary society. By 1784, the first purpose-built mail coach was put on the road by John Palmer; technological change through investment in travel and communication continued apace: in 1815, Thomas Telford began improvements to the London-Holyhead road; by 1818, John McAdam (who, in two more years would be named Surveyor-General of Metropolitan Roads in Britain-) received official approval for his "tarred macadamized" road surface, "tarmac," which is still in use today; in 1819, there were no fewer than 70 coaches every day running between London and Brighton and the journey from Cambridge to London was a mere 7 hours; and, by 1827, English mail coaches are covering more than 16,000 miles a night, every night in all weather, every day of the year, travelling at 8-12 miles per hour. Of course, carriage-building and fashion kept pace with demand for higher-speed, more comfortable travel, a phenomenon of which Austen was certainly aware.

Again, France and England diverge in their response to the new technology: the French excelled it tasteful painting, trimming and decoration of all sorts, whereas

⁸ William Felton, *A Treatise on Carriages. Comprehending Coaches, Chariots, Phaetons, Curricles, Whiskies, &c., Together With Their Proper Harness in Which the Fair Prices of Every Article Are Accurately Stated*, 1794. Unless otherwise stated, carriage diagrams are from Felton.

the English vehicles were generally regarded by the world as the best in terms of technology, quality, and durability. The importation of these sumptuous goods (indirectly, until 1815) from France, as well as Italy and Portugal are contributing to the outflow of cash from Britain, as shown in Figure 7. Carriages, in a sense, are just one type of “frivolous distinction,”⁹ but one that Austen uses consciously and consistently.



Figure 10

The English were notorious throughout Europe for their mania for horses, carriages, and driving; this is far from obvious today. There exist numerous contemporaneous observations of titled peers performing the services of coachman in order to learn driving skills, paying the coachman for their tutelage, and serving the riders of public transportation--people of remarkably lower social status than themselves--by opening up the door for them and handing them down the ladder. Europe clung to the old status symbols of servant-driven carriages and large, heavy vehicles suitable for poor roads.¹⁰ Europeans, at this time, would have regarded driving themselves as tantamount to doing their own laundry.

The specific vehicles mentioned in the novels are: chaise, gig, curricle, coach, barouche, barouche-landau, phaeton, post-chaise, hack-chaise, phaeton, cart, and

⁹ Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, Chapter 10.

¹⁰ There is one notable exception which was, of course, Napoleon, especially his “eighth wonder of the world,” the pass over the Simplon.

waggon, the latter being a trade vehicle and, therefore, not a passenger type. The term “cart” could mean just about anything, and there were myriad styles of carts for butchers, bakers, and governesses, to name just three, and could be pulled by horses, mules, dogs, or even goats! “Cart” is, then, *nearly* a generic term for a two-wheeled vehicle, but one that applies exclusively to the lower-order of vehicles, with the exception of a cocking cart or a dog cart, which could refer to a gentleman’s hunting cart. It is necessary that modern readers have at least a general understanding of the context of the various carriages—and, as they were invariably built to the owner’s specifications--the almost infinite variety of vehicles on the roads makes this mental taxonomy quite complicated.



Figure 11

If an insignia is noted on a coach and/or livery (Lady Catherine, Mr. Eliot), it is a private vehicle. A uniquely high proportion of private vehicles in England in Jane Austen's time were owner-driven; this distinction is also fundamental to context. We see that John Thorpe, Henry Tilney, and Mr. Darcy drive themselves. There are some coachmen-driven vehicles in the novels, for example the Christmas trip to Randalls and General Tilney’s removal from Bath. Mr. Gardiner is certainly not driving his coach, showing his ascension into the class of gentlemen--even if he is in trade—by virtue of his owing a coach suitable for travelling and employing a coachman. The heroes drive curricles: Mr. Darcy, Henry Tilney, as well as the anti-heroes: Walter Eliot, John Willoughby, Mr. Rushworth, and genial Charles Musgrove. The acquisition of a curricle in the latter gives us a better idea of the rents of Uppercross; Eliot’s denotes fashion and selfishness, as well as income; Willoughby’s and Rushworth’s, how they are spoiled by doting female relatives. One presumes that Willoughby could actually drive his.

Austen also uses carriages and travel as a way to define good breeding and taste. Throughout the novels there is the hero(ine) scoring system in which ladies were required to know music, singing, dancing, drawing, modern languages, etc. However unenumerated, Austen’s true gentlemen were required to know music and singing (Col. Fitzwilliam and Willoughby), dancing (Mr. Darcy and Frank Churchill), architecture (Henry Crawford), farming and estate management (Mr. Darcy and Mr. Knightly), read extensively (Mr. Bennet, Mr. Darcy), quote the classics and modern works (Captain Benwick, John Willoughby), hawking, shooting (Mr. Bingley and Mr. Darcy, Charles Musgrove), riding (Col. Brandon, John Willoughby), hunting, fishing (Mr. Darcy, Mr. Gardiner), fencing, boxing, and, of course, driving. How many men

today would be deserving of the adjective “accomplished” if, in addition to all the things above, he must be able to pilot his own high-performance, private jet well enough to fly his family safely?

FASHIONABLE DRIVING

Amos Pyebald begs leave to present his respects to the Nobility and Gentry, and to inform them that he intends opening an Academy for the instruction of Amateurs in the above branch of Polite Science. The Unicorn & Four-in-Hand will be taught by Masters of approved science, and the Tandem, Random, Harum-Scarum, Break-Neck, and Dead Certainty, by A.P. Himself.

N.B. There will always be a coach with four sham horses in the Academy so that elderly Gentlemen, and those who have families, or are constitutionally timid, may learn to mount and dismount the box, keep a firm seat, and handle the whip and reins before they turn out...

11

Austen would have been aware of the sharp distinction between city and country vehicles. Fashionable carriages for city use, such as transportation to balls, the opera, and park driving mandated the construction of very fine carriages, detailed in their decoration and upholstery. Also, because of the difference in the state of the highways, once you got into the city--surprisingly--the roads were *worse* than in the country. Country and travelling carriages were less fine and were usually constructed with space for baggage.¹² Unlike the cheap, small, very fuel-efficient vehicles today, there were no carriages for the masses. Every private vehicle denotes a substantial access to ready cash: not only income necessary to purchase and maintain the carriage, but horses, harness, livery, servants, and other requirements all specific to the location, vehicle, and its purpose.¹³

¹¹ *The Gentleman's Magazine*, 1811.

¹² Felton. *Ibid.*, “This makes it absolutely necessary to build stronger for the town than if intended for the country only, owing to the general goodness of our roads: it is also necessary to build stronger for the continent than even for the town, as the badness of their roads obliges them to use six horses to what on a well made road two would draw with equal facility,” Vol. II, p.31.

¹³ For reference, the average annual wage in Britain was less than £30 per annum. A typical maid earned £6 per year, and a groom or footman (unless he were very tall) earned about £10, plus room and board.

Costs of Carriage-Type Horses

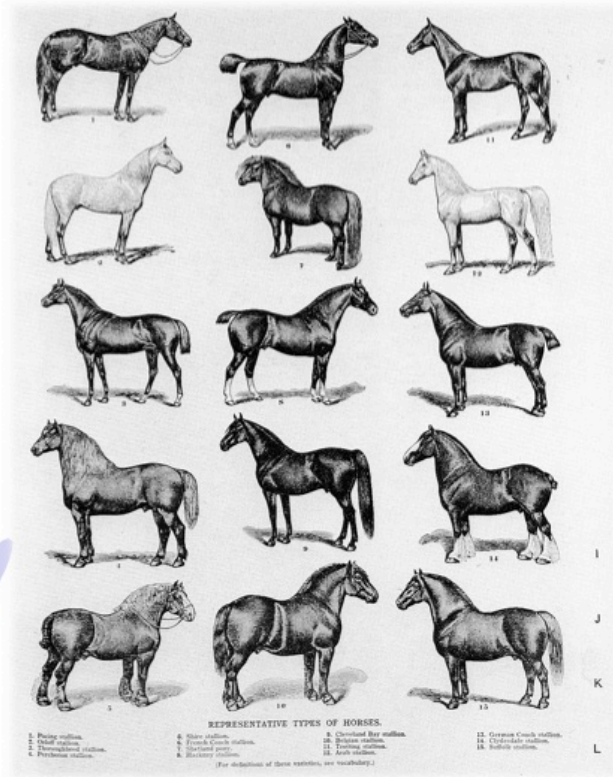


Figure 12

For example, we see that Mr. Bennet is not a wealthy man; when his horses are needed on the farm, Jane cannot have *the* carriage. Mr. Bennet, therefore, does not have fine racing-type horses, but general-purpose, heavier horses that are suitable for farm work. Mr. Bennett is also not a man bent on ruining himself by keeping separate carriage horses that were of little or no use to the economic health of his farm, of which, incidentally (as does Mr. Knightly) he oversees the daily operations as he knows the horses are in-use. Nor is he keeping other than one general-purpose carriage. So, there it is: in the few words, “(the horses) are wanted in the farm today,” Austen firmly establishes the socio-economic status of the Bennet family, Mr. Bennet’s respectability and prudence, and his most country-town indifference to fashion.¹⁴

The town coach: “Nothing contributes more to fashion or grandeur, then a good display of ornaments about a carriage... But in this, needless elegance is to be regarded, as the expense which may be added above the former description increases the price to almost double that of the plain coach.”¹⁵

¹⁴ “Where only one carriage is kept, and the use of it almost constantly required, a plain, substantial coach is to be recommended, in preference to a slight, ornamented one...and if well fashioned, and neatly executed in finishing, will always preserve a genteel appearance...” *ibid.*, p.33.

¹⁵ I need to mention that these are base sticker prices, exclusive of tax, delivery, dealer preparation, and parking in London.

Relative Prices of Carriages



Figure 13

The background figure above is the town coach, showing the extensive, expensive appointments such as curtains, lamps (often sterling silver), glass, ornamented and crested hammer-cloth (covering the box upon which the coachman sits), and the elegant springing and detailed painting of the coach itself. In Austen’s time, the terms “chariot” and “chaise” were used interchangeably, and referred to a vehicle with only one interior, forward-facing seat, i.e., a *half-bodied* vehicle. A coach referred to a larger vehicle that had both one forward-facing seat, and one facing opposite. The term “gig” referred to any two-wheeled, half-body vehicle, and encompassed infinite variations in styles and prices.

Again, we return to the very vulgar subject of money, the relative prices of carriages. For example, a Phaeton could cost anywhere from £54 to £274, a variation of more than 500%. One imagines that Miss de Bourgh’s and Mrs. Darcy’s phaetons were nearer the high end of the scale, as well as Catherine Moreland’s imagined entourage, “A heroine returning, at the close of her career, to her native village in all the triumph of recovered reputation, and all the dignity of a countess, with a long train of noble relations in their several phaetons, and three waiting-maids in a travelling chaise-and-four behind her...”¹⁶ “Her admiration of the style in when they travelled, of the fashionable chaise-and-four, postillions handsomely liveried, rising so

¹⁶ Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, Chapter 29.

regularly... and numerous outriders, properly mounted..."¹⁷



Figure 14

"A heroine in a hack post-chaise is such a blow upon sentiment, as no attempt at grandeur or pathos can withstand."¹⁸ "Not in the stage, I assure you," replied Miss Steele, with quick exultation; "we came post all the way, and had a very smart beau to attend us. Dr. Davies was coming to town, and so we thought we'd join him in a post-chaise; and he behaved very genteelly, and paid ten or twelve shillings more than we did."¹⁹ Now, replace "hack post-chaise" with "carriage" or even "hack carriage" and it beomes nonsensical. Respectable people hire "hacks," as in rented carriages. Heroines do not travel in hack post-chaises (Lucy Steel—not an heroine.)



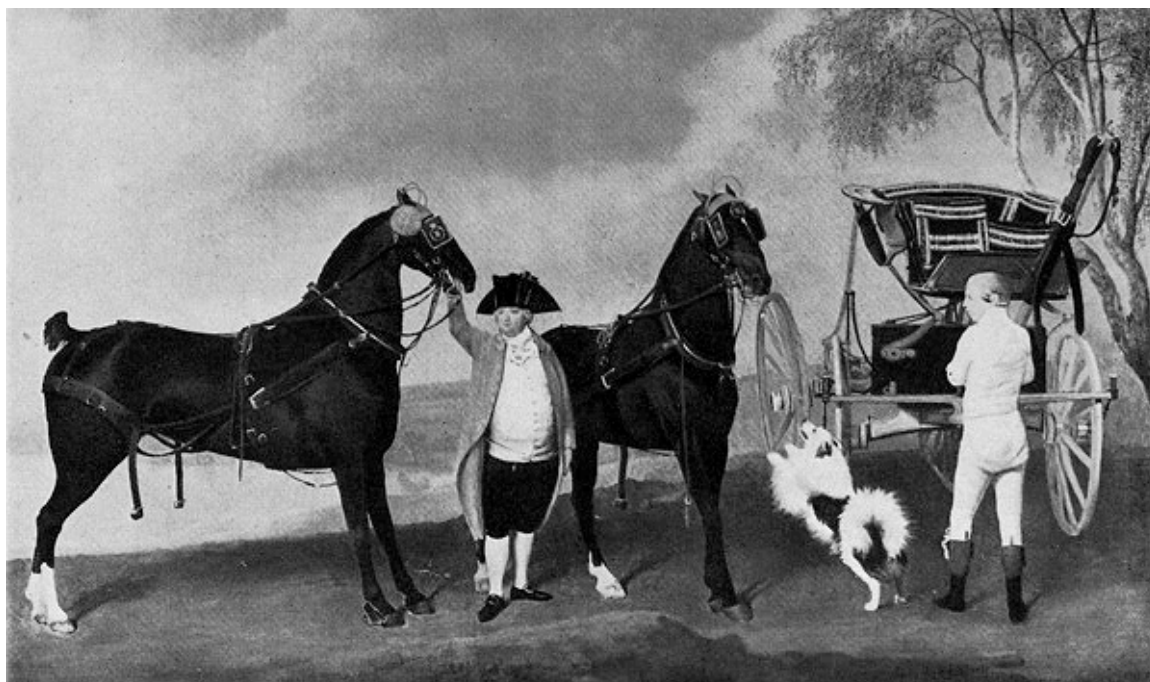
Figure 15

¹⁷ Ibid., Chapter 20.

¹⁸ Ibid., Chapter 29.

¹⁹ Jane Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*.

“Lord M—,” it runs, “emulous of shining in the most elevated sphere, first drove a phaeton seven feet from the ground: Sir John L immediately made an addition of a supernumerary travelling case to his, and raised it six inches higher. Lord M— applied immediately to his coachmaker in Liquor-pond-street for *two* travelling cases, with which he speedily drove about the streets for the entertainment of the public. Sir John L was stung to the quick; and Lord M—’s round hat was now a mere pigmy to his. His Lordship, happy at rival inventions, immediately added two more horses to his triumphal car, and drove four for exhibition, from Grosvenor Square to Gray’s-Inn-lane. ‘Now, my Lad,’ said he, ‘I have you!’ but how vain are the boastings of mankind? The knight appeared the very next day with a phaeton-and-six in Holborn. ‘Zounds!’ said his lordship, ‘this is too much! what shall I do?—how can I match my four with two more? No credit at my banker’s—in arrears with my horse-dealer—I am at my wit’s end! John, I shall not take an airing in Smithfield to-day; I’ll give my horses some rest—they were hard worked over the stones yesterday.’ Here the contest now lies—its importance must be obvious to every beholder—his lordship has not slept these three nights, and it is imagined he will at length be obliged to take the hint from Colman’s prologue to the *Suicide*, and preposterous as it may appear, add a fifth-wheel to his phaeton. Sir John is greatly elated, and may literally be said to be in very high spirits upon his temporary triumph.”²⁰



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George Stubbs

Plate VI. The Prince of Wales’s HIGHFLYER PHAETON, with horses and Thomas, the State Coachman. See page 59

Figure 16

We come next to the barouche. This is a handsome, convertible four-wheeled carriage, used extensively throughout the first half of the 19th Century. It became an extremely fashionable summer vehicle and was considered to be the ultimate for

²⁰ *Town and Country Magazine*, 1778.

Park driving, second in expense only to the Town Coach. The Barouche was driven from a high “perch” seat by a coachman, and might have a seat for footmen at the back. Lady Dalrymple, the Palmers, Robert Ferrars, Lady Catherine, and Henry Crawford all own a barouche. The carriage in Figure 17 is a low-end barouche with no footman’s seat, but may have been driven with postillions or other outriders. It is fairly plain in its appointments, so probably there was only the coachman in attendance. The barouche in Figure 18 is a much grander vehicle, and has a *rumble seat* for footmen.



Figure 17

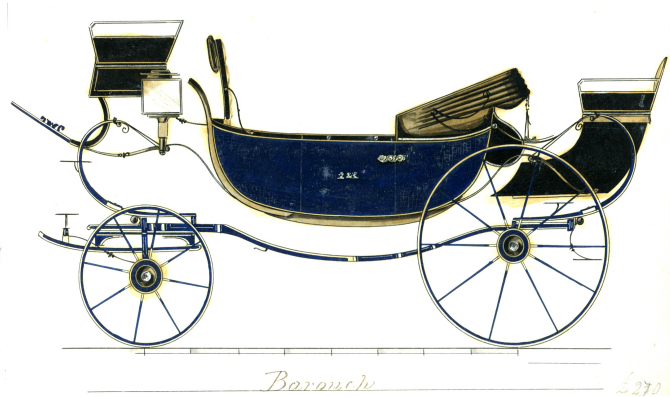


Figure 18

A Landau, also starting with the base sticker price of around £185 pounds, gets morphed into the Barouche-Landau figures several times in Austen’s novels. This vehicle achieved its popularity when the Prince Regent, too fat to climb into a tall carriage, created the hybrid: a low Landau body with the addition of a driving box like the barouche. Use of the Barouche-Landau is a pointed social statement: “Barouche-Landau” conveys the fact that the recently rich Mr. Suckling is trying to emulate the Prince Regent, an absurd extravagance that impresses Mrs. Elton greatly, but is certainly used by Austen in a deprecating way.

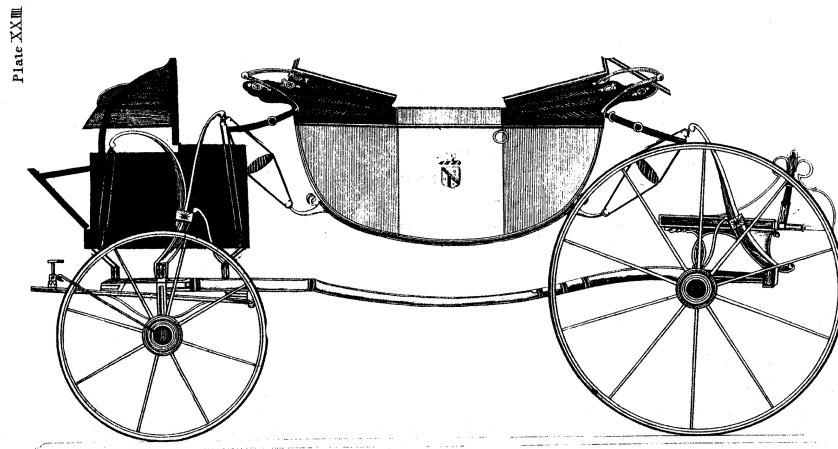


Figure 19

Another example of what we miss when reading Austen without the necessary

contextual information is Austen's implicit *praise* for her characters. The Gardiners have a travelling *coach*. We know this because there are three people riding in it. There would be at least one additional servant on the rumble seat, possibly two, in addition to the coachman. He has made enough money that he travels like a gentleman. This is re-enforced by Lizzy's statement that Mr. Gardiner is sending his man-servant. This context assumes the costs of keeping and/or hiring *four* horses (because of the weight, a coach-body carriage is always driven with four horses); and, this is all at expensive London rents, a substantial sum, even in Cheapside.



Figure 20

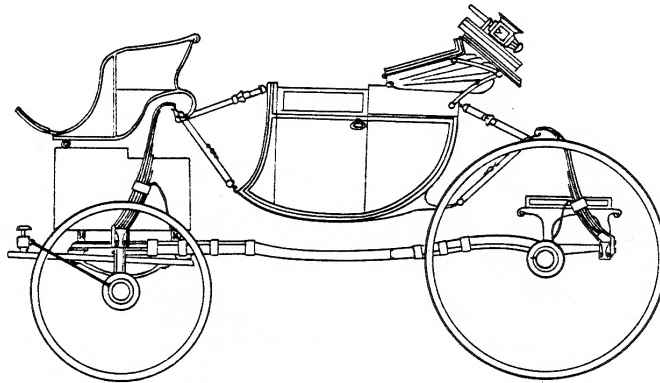
One assumes, on the lengthy trip to Derbyshire, that the Gardiners are using post horses, as it was possible to travel much more expeditiously (and expensively) by changing horses every ten to twenty miles of travel; the more frequently the horses were changed, the faster they could be driven between posting stops. We don't know if the Gardiners keep their own horses in London; because of the astronomical expense involved, they probably hire horses when they wish to travel. A modern analogue would be using NetJets™ instead of commercial air travel.



21

Figure 21

“She had something to suffer perhaps when they came into contact again, in seeing Anne restored to the rights of seniority, and the mistress of a very pretty landaulet.”²²



Landaulette, fore and hind whip springs c. 1790

Figure 22

The landaulet/landaulette was also known as the Demi-Landau. As a Landau, it had only a rear (forward-facing) seat. As an “ette,” this is a *ladies* vehicle not appropriate for Capt. Wentworth to be driving or even driven *in*. The subtext to *Persuasion* is the dependency of women. Anne *waits* for Captain Wentworth. “We live at home, quiet, confined, and our feelings prey upon us.”²³ Anne is dependent upon Lady Russel for transportation as she leaves Kellynch Hall for the last time; Mary Musgrove is dependent upon her mother-in-law, who is dependent upon—in turn—her husband. Anne relies on the Crofts to give her a ride her when she's tired; there is protracted discussion about who gets to go to

²¹ Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, Chapter 39.

²² Jane Austen, *Persuasion*, Chapter 24.

²³ *Ibid.*, Chapter 23.

Lyme Regis. Mary Musgrove laments that, "...and it is so very uncomfortable not having a carriage of one's own,"²⁴ while her husband has bought himself a curricle. In Bath, "Her ladyship's carriage was a barouche, and did not hold more than four with any comfort,"²⁵ Mrs. Clay is preferred, so Anne must walk. The use of barouche is intentional; it sets the socioeconomic status of the Dowager Countess, and provides another shocking opportunity for Miss Eliot to slight her sister egregiously by giving Mrs. Clay both preference and precedence. There are no such discussions made about men in the third-party. The men in the novel come and go...the women wait and hope to be asked.

This specific term, *landaulet*, says two very important things: first, Capt. Wentworth was certainly extremely generous to his wife; the landaulet is expensive, stylish and requires at least one man-servant and a coachman, in addition to two horses. As an indicator of a cash purchase, Austen knows very little about the actual value of cash money. Austen gets this specific use quite wrong in the sense that the most that Anne and Capt. Wentworth could have to live on from his prize money is £1100 per year. The maintenance for this vehicle in a city such as Bath would cost about a quarter of their annual disposable income to maintain the horses (at least two) and the vehicle and the servants specific to the vehicle. And, this carriage is necessarily a second "car" for the Wentworths, as it is inappropriate for Captain Wentworth to use as daily transportation.

However, soaring above this miscalculation, Austen uses the landaulet as a symbol of a woman's *independence*. In this last-completed novel, Jane Austen absolutely meant to set Capt. Wentworth head and shoulders above Fitzwilliam Darcy; Wentworth is the only Austen hero who gives his wife that most precious gift of independence. Anne may have no Uppercross Hall before her,²⁶ but she won't be waiting at Uppercross, either.

Austen also uses these specific nouns to show unreasonableness. In the Age of Enlightenment, being unreasonable was a grave fault, indeed. John Thorpe,²⁷

"Curricle-hung, you see; seat, trunk, sword-case, splashing board, lamps, silver moulding, all you see complete; the iron-work as good as new, or better. He asked fifty guineas; I closed with him directly, threw down the money, and the carriage was mine."

John Thorpe has paid about £52 for a used gig that new costs about £50. And, it's so far from a curricle that Isabella Thorpe calls it an "odious gig." Austen would be more familiar with less-expensive, country vehicles. She uses this

²⁴ Ibid., Chapter 5.

²⁵ Ibid., Chapter 19.

²⁶ Ibid., Chapter 23.

²⁷ Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, Chapter 7.

statement to show her readers that Thorpe is not only a poser, but a foolish and unreasonable one as well. He is also, obviously, very poorly bred by speaking directly and to a stranger about money--especially to a woman--in a very detailed and unnecessary way. Worse yet, he is trying to pass off his one-horse gig (Figures 23 and 24) as a curricle (see Figures 25 and 26).

Plate XLIII

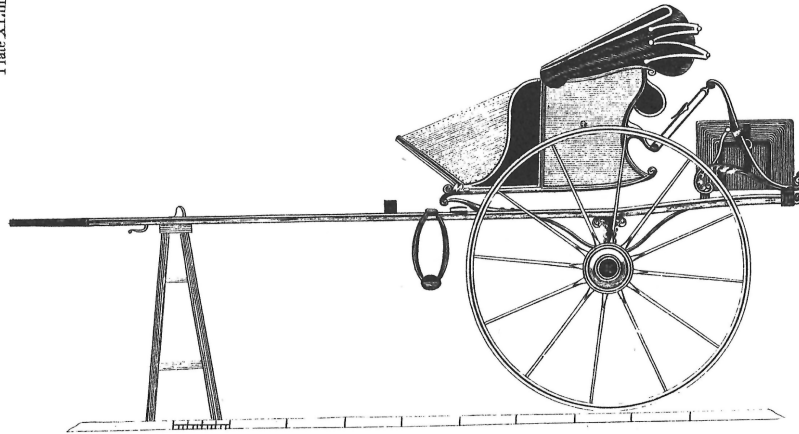
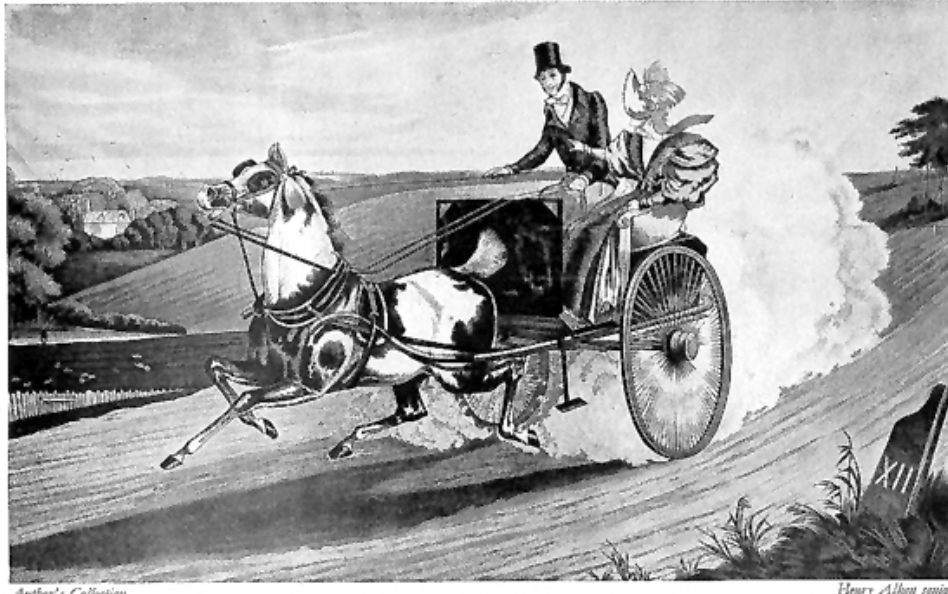


Figure 23

As vehicles were custom-made to an owner's specifications, there can be a wide assortment of vehicles called by any one particular name: for example a *gig*. Gigs date from the 17th Century, and are basically a descendent of the sedan chair; they are a sedan chair on wheels. A gig could be the equivalent of a Ford Fiesta or a higher-end like a Boxster, but in all cases they were light, comparatively cheap and took only one horse. In 1800 there are about 20 differentiated types of gigs.

..for the Admiral and Mrs. Croft were generally out of doors together, instead interesting themselves in their new possessions, their grass, and their sheep, and dawdling about in a way not endurable to a third person, or driving out in a gig, lately added to their establishment."²⁸

²⁸ Jane Austen, *Persuasion*, Chapter 9.



Antler's Collection

Plate IV. Mr Barclay driving his STANHOPE GIG. See page 48

Figure 24

Once again, Austen is making a very pointed social statement with her use of the particular term. We know from the text following that Admiral Croft is not a particularly good driver. Having spent his professional life at sea, this is not surprising. It also indicates, by the fact of his not being a proficient driver, that he is not a gentleman; he rose in his rank through his merit. The choice of gig indicates practicality, little desire for show (we contrast this with the penurious Sir Walter and his coach-and-four), a vehicle which may be driven safely on country lanes, a small vehicle where company is unanticipated--in short--an embodiment of the Crofts as people: easy-going, practical, self-made, unostentatious, and useful.

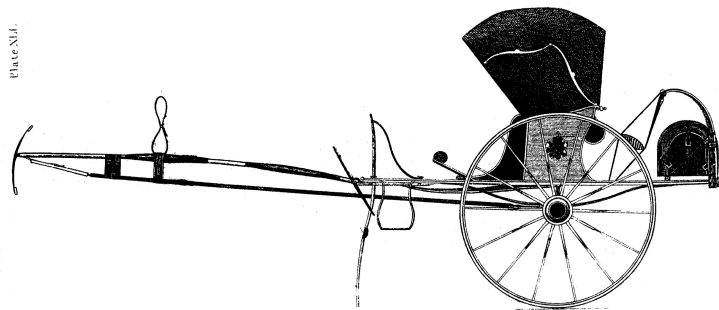


Figure 25

A genuine curricle, on the other hand, was always driven by two extremely light racing-type horses, built with two large, lightweight wheels, a very small board seat which could barely accommodate two passengers, and a feather-weight long pole between the horses: "the proprietors of this sort of carriage are

in general persons of high repute for fashion...²⁹ A proper curricle had a base price of £150, out of reach of John Thorpe at three times the price of a gig. The curricle was eventually modified to include shafts, in addition to the pole, because of the tendency of the lightweight pole to break, freeing both horses from attachment to the cart, other than the thin reins in the driver's hand. One presumes that Mr. Darcy would have speedily amended his curricle to "Proper" status, or taken the innovation as time to buy a new, improved one.

The curricle was a young man's vehicle and the vehicle of choice for the young Prince of Wales and Mr. Darcy. The curricle design by the Count d'Orsay was the fastest horse-drawn vehicle, ever. As a consequence of their expense and danger, they were a conspicuous display of wealth, horsepower, and the skill of the driver. "When the sound of a carriage drew them to a window, and they saw a gentleman and a lady in a curricle driving up the street. Elizabeth immediately recognizing the livery...³⁰ Mr. Darcy--in that one word--is portrayed as wealthy, stylish, manly, and competent. "It was a gentleman's carriage, a curricle, but only coming round from the stable-yard to the front door; somebody must be going away. It was driven by a servant in mourning."³¹ (Mr. Eliot, *not* a gentleman.)

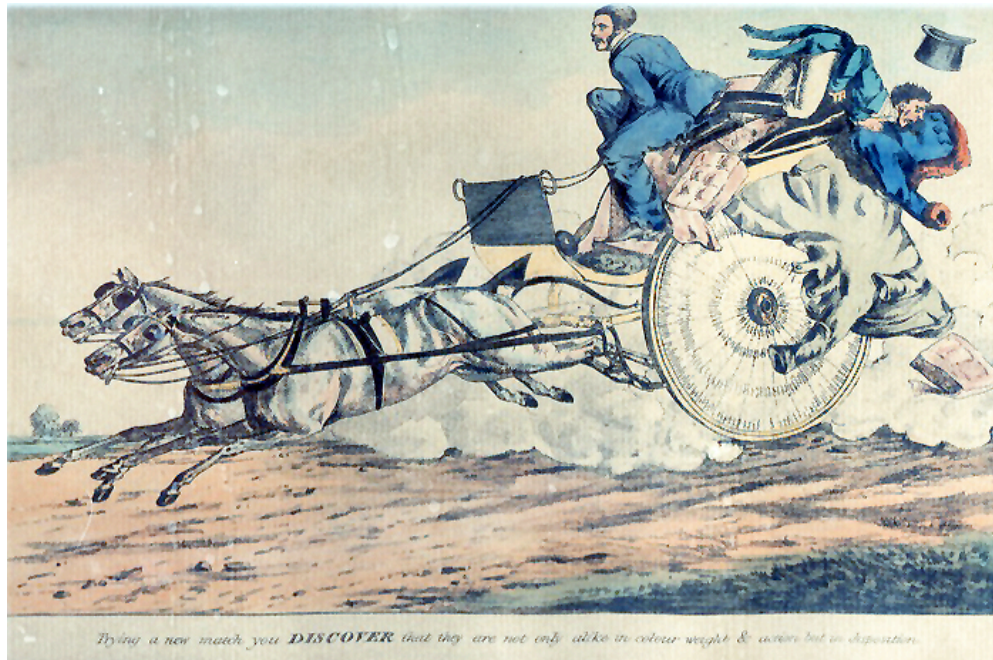


Figure 26

Curricles were frequently called "break-neck carts" or, alternately, "bankrupt carts," because they were, in the words of the contemporary Chief Justice Mans-

²⁹ Felton, *Vol. II*, p.98.

³⁰ Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, Chapter 44.

³¹ Jane Austen, *Persuasion*, Chapter 12.

field, “frequently driven by those who could neither afford the Money to support them nor the Time spent in using them, the want of which in their Business brought them to Bankruptcy.”³²

The term cart can similarly apply to a wide variety of vehicles, so its use is entirely context-dependent. Unlike a gig, a cart can be either two- or four-wheeled; it can be very proletarian such as Jane Austen’s donkey cart or a goat cart; useful like a luggage cart or dog cart; or, very elegant such as a Club Cart also called a Cocking Cart.

“A day never passes in which parties of ladies, however important their business, whether in quest of pastry, millinery, or even (as in the present case) of young men, are not detained on one side or the other by carriages, horsemen, or carts.”³³

Note the sliding social scale here going up, beginning with pastry to young men, and down again, ending with carts. “Small heart had Harriet for visiting. Only a half an hour before... Her evil stars had led her to the very spot where, at the moment, a trunk, directed to The Rev. Philip Elton, White Hart, Bath, was to be seen under the operation of being lifted into the butcher’s cart.”³⁴ Note Austen’s use of a borrowed tradesman’s vehicle, a butcher’s cart, establishing Mr. Elton’s low socioeconomic status as well as his social class.



Figure 27

A *wagon*, similarly to a cart, can have many sizes and forms, but it always has

³² John Jervis, *The Traveller's Oracle; or, Maxims for Locomotion: Containing Precepts for Promoting the Pleasures, and for Preserving the Health of Travellers. Part II*, p.18.

³³ Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, Ch 7.

³⁴ Jane Austen, *Emma*, Chapter 23. Austen is making an additional dig at Mr. Elton in that a butcher’s cart is a very *small* vehicle, and hence, Mr. Elton has few possessions and/or he is paying the absolute minimum to get his case to the stage, where he is using *public* transportation.

four wheels, and the horses are attached to the vehicle by means of heavy chains, called *tugs*, as opposed to the leather straps, or *traces*, that are used for passenger carriages. There is only one reference to a wagon, and that is hauling Mary Crawford's harp. The inference here is that the harp needs a larger trade vehicle to carry it. However, there is a telling passage directly after when Edmund Bertram says, "the hire of a cart at any time might not be so easy as you suppose; our farmers are not in the habit of letting them out; but, in harvest, it must be quite out of their power to spare the horse."³⁵ Mary Crawford is surprised and indignant when she cannot make the hire of the cart and horse. She views these vehicles and their owners as quite low on the social scale, indeed, and certainly feels that her convenience must necessarily take precedence over their need to get the harvest in. This is a pointed reference to Mary Crawford's lack of reasonability--again a major indicator of disapprobation in the Austen lexicon.

A few other terms and a little context: *post* can either mean: (1) a public conveyance. Robert Martin,³⁶ Fanny³⁷ and William Price,³⁸ and Mr. Elton³⁹ all travel by the "stage," privately run public travelling coaches that ran throughout England on set schedules. Besides taking paying customers, these coaches were frequently used as the goods transports of the time, carrying parcels, foodstuffs and even livestock on a per-mile basis. Stops and break-downs were frequent, and coaches were often ridiculously over-loaded. Drivers were frequently in the pay of highwaymen, passing information to the robbers as to who was on the coach likely to have money or valuables. Coachmen and post-boys demanded additional fees for trifling services, and one was assured of the worst-possible seat if one did not or could not pay for a seat inside in cold, wet weather or outside, in the heats of summer.

In 1770, a British newspaper reported, "It were greatly to be wished, the stage-coaches were put under some regulations as to the number of persons and quantity of baggage. Thirty-four persons were in and about the Hartford coach this day when it broke down by one of the braces giving way." In 1785 and 1790, legislation was passed on the number of passengers a coach could lawfully carry. In 1810, the Rev. William Knowlton invented a patent coach with helper wheels which were really smaller, spare wheels fitted under the carriage to keep it upright in the event of an axle or wheel failure, "which, at present, constantly attends the breaking down, and which has so frequently proved fatal to

³⁵ Jane Austen, *Mansfield Park*, Chapter 6. Edmund, with this language, indicates that the farmers in the district of Mansfield Park are comfortably off, and have no need to earn extra money with their vehicles, which they own.

³⁶ Jane Austen, *Emma*, Chapter 18.

³⁷ Jane Austen, *Mansfield Park*, Chapter 1.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, Chapter 27.

³⁹ Jane Austen, *Emma*, Chapter 5.

the coachman and outside passengers.” A few were made and speedily forgotten, despite the improvement in safety.



Figure 28

(2) Beginning in 1812, the Royal Mail's passenger service came into being. Seats on these coaches were more expensive than the public stage-coaches as they had strictly limited passenger and baggage limits, as well as armed guards who travelled with the coach to protect the mail. These coachmen and guards were paid employees of the mail service, removing them from the temptation of collusion with highwaymen. The Royal Mail also offered some “express” services that travelled between major towns without stopping at smaller, local villages.



Figure 29

Or, (3) *post* might refer to an expensive rental of horses put to one's own private carriage, or the hire of a private carriage and horses, usually a *travelling chaise*. "Col. Brandon's horses were announced. 'You do not go to town on horseback do you?' added Sir John. 'No -- only to Honiton. I shall then go post.'"⁴⁰

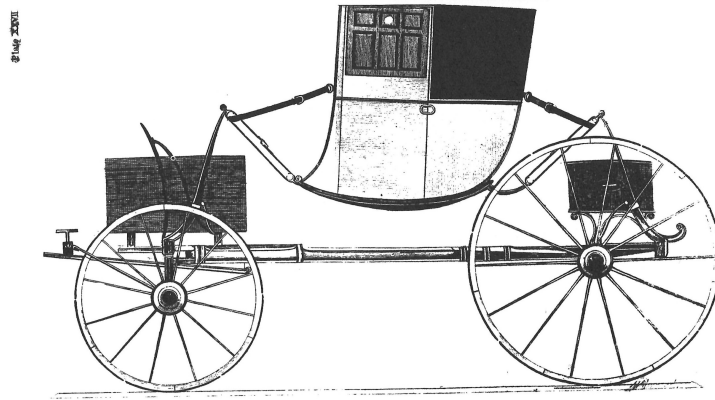


Figure 30

By inference,⁴¹ Col. Brandon means post-chaise which is a medium-sized, half-bodied (only one forward-facing seat) carriage, specifically built for travelling long distances relatively comfortably. Col. Brandon had to go to a larger town that would afford a posting inn with traveling carriages in addition to hiring post-horses. A traveller with the means could hire a post-chaise; this included the hire of horses and the post-boy, who would return with the vehicle and horses. The inn would stable Col. Brandon's saddle-horse until his return.

⁴⁰ Jane Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, Chapter 13.

⁴¹ Why "by inference"? We know that Col. Brandon is a *gentleman* of means. He is in a hurry. Taking a public coach would entail numerous stops, impeding his travel, as well as the inconvenience of being crowded into a stifling coach with people of uncertain hygiene, or sitting on top of the coach, a precarious position liable to the forces of inclement weather. Neither of these alternatives is likely.

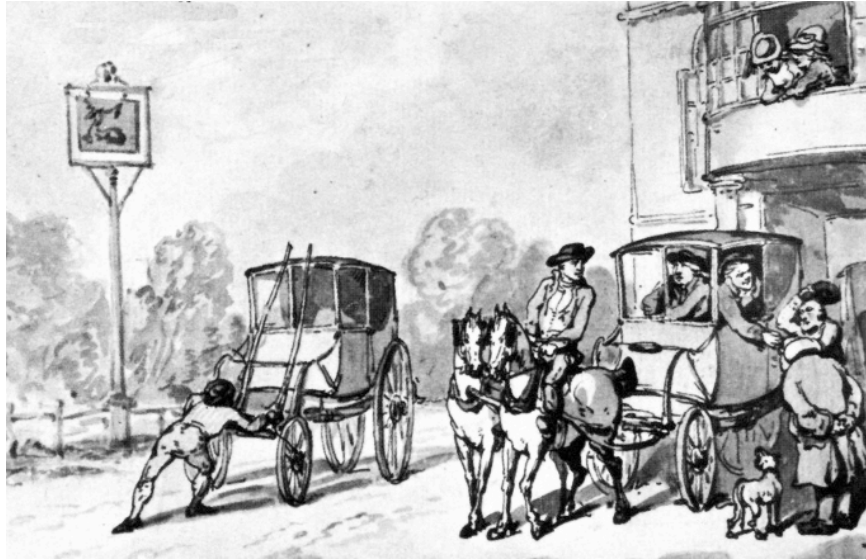


Figure 31

For longer journeys, requiring extended time on the road, one could own or hire a *dormeuse*. This was a travelling chaise with an extended front compartment to accommodate passengers who wished to sleep during the journey. The largest version of the travelling carriage was the travelling coach. This was a full-bodied vehicle (two bench seats, one facing forward, and one facing backward). One assumes that the John Knightley family had a large travelling coach to haul their large family and servants from London to Highbury. The travelling coach had the advantage that the family could ride inside the coach, and the servants outside on the roof seats, and/or on the box with the coachman. Mr. Gardiner's carriage is using hired horses to pick up Elizabeth Bennet and Maria Lucas: "Where shall you change horses? Oh! Bromley, of course. If you mention my name at The Bell, you will be attended to."⁴² One assumes that the Gardiners, with their quantity of children and servants, would have a travelling coach to accommodate their family, nanny and man-servant on their visits to Longbourne.

However the term *post* is used, it is expensive. The usual charge of five pence per mile sitting inside the coach or three pence per mile sitting outside. in today's money is between eight and four dollars, respectively, per mile. Higher rates were charged by the mail coaches and fast (express) day-coaches; lower rates applied for the heavier night-coaches. "...for the original plan was that William should go up by mail from Northampton the following night, which would not have allowed him an hour's rest before he must have got into a Portsmouth coach..." Mr. Crawford offered a place in his private carriage, preventing the tiring journey that travel by the public coach implied. We see by this offer that Henry Crawford is making an unusually generous offer to take William from Northamptonshire to Portsmouth, a distance of some 130 miles. Using post-horses, that journey could not be completed in under two full days of travel.

⁴² Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, Chapter 37.

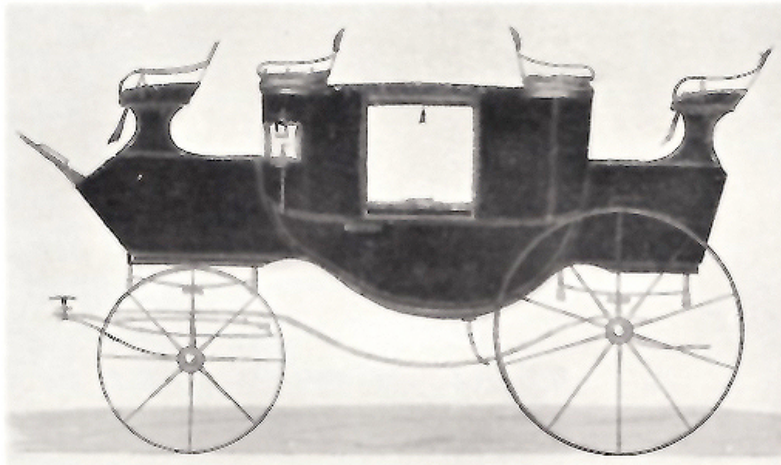


Figure 32

A *postilion* (see Figures 31 and 33) is a servant out-rider who drives the vehicle from the lead horse. The second postilion is for show. A *rumble seat* is a bench at the back of the carriage for more servants to attend. The lady in Figure 33 is *park driving*. Park driving of any kind was never an indication of transportation, but simply a vehicle used to see and be seen, either in your own park or the public park such as Central Park or Hyde Park (see also Fig. 5). One supposes Mrs. Darcy's phaeton is a park-type phaeton. Park-type vehicles were very fine, and not equipped for long journeys.



Figure 33

A *four-in-hand* (or more) in a pleasure carriage is an unnecessary expense, purely for the purpose of the display of wealth and elegance. Horses must be matched in pairs and fours, not only in terms of height, color, and general body type, but must have dispositions to work in a team. *Leaders* (the front two hors-

es) are generally somewhat smaller than the *wheelers* (horses at the back who are actually pulling the carriage), and have a showier temperament. Wheelers, on the other hand, need to be larger, heavier, and have a generally docile disposition, willing to follow. The addition of a pair of horses to a team increases the cost of the team several-fold due to the constraints in making up the larger team. A team of six has a *swing* pair in the middle. Driving a four-in-hand or six-in-hand on crowded city streets requires an immense amount of skill.



Figure 34

By the time of Jane Austen's death, private and royal mail coaches were traveling faster in England, longer, and safer than anywhere else in the world. Carriage horses were evolving during this period as well. Lighter, faster, better-bred, better-fed horses naturally accompanied the advances in the technology of roads and carriages. The heavy draft animals, once necessary for moving goods and people through muddy, rutted roads, were now replaced by specially bred carriage horses. These horses were crosses between the heavy horses and lighter, smaller horses and could be anywhere on the scale. The lighter and more elegant the carriage, the lighter and more elegant (and faster) the horses could be to pull it. Figure 35 is a contemporary drawing showing the relative body differences between the light, racing-style horse and a heavier-bodied type.

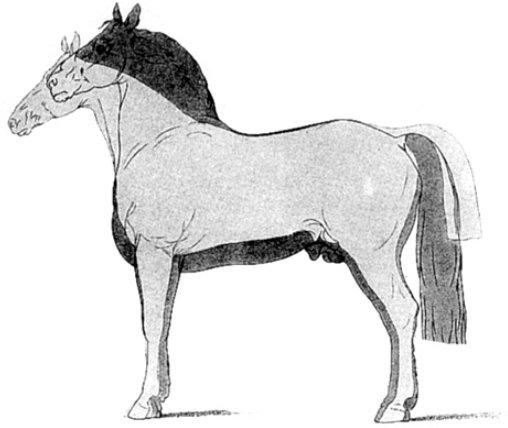


Figure 35

A record was set by John Selby for changing four horses at a posting stop in just under 90 seconds. Mr. Selby's record for a stage-coach with post-horses from central London to Brighton was done in under 4 hours, a distance of 54 miles, although one or two gentlemen in a curricle could beat that time by an hour; according to Google maps it now takes one hour and 34 minutes by car and, if you've ever been on the M25/M23, that is unreasonably optimistic.

Here are a few of my favorite "specific nouns and phrases" and modern-day translations.

"They will have their Rolls-Royce Corniche, of course, which holds four perfectly, and therefore, without saying anything of our car... They would hardly come in their Bentley, I think, at that season of the year. Indeed... I shall decidedly recommend their bringing the Rolls-Royce Corniche."



Figure 36

"Many a time Selina said, when she has been going to Bristol, 'I really cannot get this girl to move from the house. I absolutely must go in by myself, though I hate being stuck up in the Rolls-Royce Corniche without a companion.'"⁴³

⁴³ Jane Austen, *Emma*, Chapter 14. Note that the Sucklings are in Bristol, indicating that their fortune is new money, acquired by trade.

“I have no doubt of it being our carriage with Miss Bates and Jane. Our coachman and horses are so extremely expeditious!—I believe we drive faster than anybody.—What a pleasure it is to send one’s carriage for a friend.” When speaking of the Suckling’s Barouche-Landau, the carriage is specifically named. Obviously, Mr. Elton has purchased a carriage with his wife’s money upon their marriage, but it is a low vehicle, and so its type is not so deserving of mention.⁴⁴

Here is an exchange in *Sense and Sensibility* which shows exactly how deft is Austen’s use of language.⁴⁵

The Miss Bertrams laughed at the idea, assuring her that the barouche would hold four perfectly well, independent of the box, on which *one* might go with him. “But why is it necessary, said Edmund, “that Crawford’s carriage, or his *only*, should be employed? Why is no use to be made of my mother’s chaise? I could not, when the scheme was first mentioned the other day, understand why a visit from the family were not to be made in the carriage of the family.” “What! Cried Julia: go boxed up three in a post-chaise in this weather, when one might have seats in a barouche! No, my dear Edmund, that will not quite do.”⁴⁶

Edmund Bertram is obliquely deprecating Mr. Crawford’s barouche—changing its noun to the general term, having nothing of his own to drive. He mentions his mother’s chaise—a respectable gentleman’s vehicle, i.e., not a cart—and so deserving of the specific noun, that would seat at most three people (uncomfortably—it is built to carry two people) and it has no coach-box to accommodate another person. This is clearly a stretch, even without the issue of warm weather and a closed carriage. Lady Bertram only has *one* general-purpose chaise, showing that the family does not travel. Why? The chaise was likely a purchase upon her marriage, and is probably not at all new or fashionable, in addition to being too small. The Miss Bertrams are keen to ride in a fashionable new carriage, and secure for themselves the pleasure of arguing over who will sit next to Mr. Crawford who is obviously driving his own barouche.

⁴⁴ Ibid., Chapter 2. Note that it does have a coachman and two horses, which means it is not of the gig class, but is likely to be a chaise of the lower type. This is borne out by the fact that Mrs. Elton was not in the vehicle when it picked up Miss Bates and Jane Fairfax, as a chaise most comfortably accommodates two people. Also, driving “expeditiously” is not something well-bred people boast of; driving safely is usually preferred: “driven along on bad pavement by a most knowing-looking coachman with all of the vehemence that could most fitly endanger the lives of himself, his companion, and his horse.” (Northanger Abbey, Chapter 7.)

⁴⁵ As an aside, it is also interesting to note the confusion in class and status between the titled Bertrams and the untitled Crawfords, where they are both made equal in their ability to provide the trappings of transportation of the gentle class. In fact, the Crawfords clearly come out ahead here.

⁴⁶ Jane Austen, *Mansfield Park*, Chapter 8.

Edmund grudgingly agrees to the barouche plan, but is cranky about it and uses the opportunity to boycott the party *and* the barouche by proposing that Fanny attend in his place. This is superficially seen as a concern for Fanny, but if you understand his chagrin at having no carriage and his mother's poor performance in that regard, it is easy to see that his motive for not going to Sotherton springs from wounded pride, and not entirely from solicitude for Fanny.

"They had not long finished their breakfast before Mrs. Palmer's barouche stopped at the door,"⁴⁷ but Mrs. Jennings has only a chaise, indicating that Mrs. Jennings' daughter has significantly married up from her mother's economic status. Mrs. Jennings is delighted with her own work.

On a more serious note, vehicles can also denote serious flaws of character and judgment, and even of safety and decency. The most glaring example certainly must be General Tilney and his treatment of Catherine Moreland. Early in their acquaintance, he commits a wanton act of impropriety in his mistaken scheme to get a rich wife for his younger son: "and much was Catherine then surprised by the General's proposal of her taking his place in his son's curricle for the rest of the journey: 'the day was fine and he was anxious for her seeing as much of the country as possible.'"⁴⁸ The curricle was an avowedly dangerous vehicle, and we have no prior idea of Edmund's prowess as a driver. What is more serious, however, is General Tilney's extraordinary breach of propriety in suggesting the Catherine take a seat with his son in a vehicle *alone*. This breach of safety and propriety *in loco parentis* eclipses Mrs. Bennet's scheming completely. Mrs. Bennet may be unreasonable and foolish, but General Tilney is positively abrogating his responsibilities as a parent and as a gentleman.



A DOUBLE-BODIED COACH
Original lent by Messrs. Ackermann

Figure 37

⁴⁷ Jane Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, Chapter 26.

⁴⁸ Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, Chapter 20.

However, even this misguided action pales in comparison to his subsequent decision to send the daughter of a gentleman, a young woman with no money, no experience, and no chaperone, by *public coach* a distance of more than 70 miles, *alone*. Had not Eleanor Tilney been perceptive *and* able to give Catherine the necessary funds to secure her *possibility* of safe travel to her home, a young woman travelling post, alone, would have been regarded as little removed from prostitution, and entitled to all of the abuse and real danger that implies.

Salisbury she had known to be her point on leaving Northanger; but after the first stage, she had been indebted to the post-masters for the names of the places which were then to conduct her to it; so great had been her ignorance of her route. She met with nothing, however, to distress or frighten her. Her youth, civil manners, and *liberal pay* procured her all the attention that a traveller like herself could require; and stopping only to change horses, she travelled on for about eleven hours without incident or alarm, and between six and seven o'clock in the evening found herself entering Fullerton.⁴⁹

Austen underscores these evils when she includes “the distress of Catherine’s mind...and whatever the humiliation of her biographer in writing it...her recovered reputation” a few paragraphs later. It is only when considered in the context of such an enormity--such a complete abnegation of any notion of the claims of honor and responsibilities of a gentleman and a father--that leads us to the reasonability of the conclusion that Edmund follows Catherine and marries her. If one does not fully comprehend the actual villainy involved *and* Edmund’s understanding of the gravity of his father’s offenses in compromising--at least potentially--Catherine’s very reputation and, hence, her marriageability, unless this sequence is seen through that lens of the abasement and horror denoted by a young girl sent travelling alone in a *stage-coach*, Edmund Tilney’s actions become unreasonable, unpredictable, and even incomprehensible.

One more passage involving vehicles in the novels deserves a mention in that a little knowledge of carriages and travel changes the literal construction of the passage significantly: “They perceived a chaise-and four-driving up the lawn... The horses were post; and, neither the carriage nor the livery of the servant who preceded it were familiar to them. As it was certain, however, that *somebody* was coming...”⁵⁰ Again, Austen assumes her readers would know immediately that a private carriage, livery, and outriders denote an extraordinary equipage of wealth and distinction. Private posting on English roads was a luxury, and Lady Catherine is traveling “in state”: she had at least one outrider and with four horses (so probably two postillions); and, the carriage required two footmen; all in addition to her waiting-woman and the coachman. We know that Lady Catherine

⁴⁹ Ibid., emphasis mine.

⁵⁰ Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, Chapter 56.

rine would not put herself to the expense and inconvenience of taking two, or even one larger vehicle town to accommodate Lizzie and Maria. What we miss today--that would have been immediately apparent to anyone of Austen's time--is that Lady Catherine is sparing *no* expense or inconvenience. She is traveling as expeditiously and *expensively* as possible. As modern readers, we understand that she intends the show of wealth to intimidate.

Let's read that passage: "...and they perceived a chaise-and-four driving up the lawn. It was too early for visitors..."⁵¹ From this text, we know that she has obviously spent the night at an inn on the road, putting up all of the servants, in addition to herself, so as to arrive at Longbourne too early in the morning. This indicates that the trip was not planned—it was an impetuous decision—as she likely could have made the journey in a day, arriving in the afternoon at Longbourne. The best guess is that she left *immediately* after hearing the rumor of Darcy's engagement with Elizabeth.

Why would Lizzie not have known the livery if she had stayed at Rosings for six weeks? There may be an error here. But what is *no* error is that a reader of Jane Austen's time would realize that Lady Catherine not just angry, she is positively *deranged* with anxiety. What we miss is that, upon hearing that her nephew might marry Miss Bennett, she has become so upset that she has ceased to respond *reasonably*. Here is a woman concerned with the trivialities of the expense of Charlotte's joints of meats, Charlotte's own performance of her house-keeping tasks, the price of the windows at Rosings, and nearly every other expenditure capable of being itemized, discussed, and displayed. Yet her trip to Longhorn is made in defiance of all expense. If, for example, Rosings were 50 miles from Longbourne, the trip would have cost over £120 just in post-horse charges alone—about \$100,000 today--exclusive of tips, meals, and accommodation. Her over-reaction in her immediate, ill-considered trip to Longbourne and subsequent application to her nephew underscore this extreme loss of balance in her thinking. One can only imagine in what wild manner she accosted Mr. Darcy on her return from Longbourne.

⁵¹ Ibid.



Figure 38

As this paper concerns carriages, I will finish our carriage timeline by noting that, by 1835, Royal Mail coaches and 3,300 other coaches were running regularly over British roads, employing 150,000 horses and 30,000 coachmen, grooms, guards and yard hands. Travelling by coach flourished between 1815 and 1840; then came the railroads. In 1837, the Great Western Railway as established by Brunel, and by 1840 the use of coaches for long-distance travel was becoming increasingly rare as the railway infrastructure expanded throughout Britain. Horse-drawn vehicles were used through the first World War when, by 1922, with the advent the automobile, the lorry, and the tractor, we see the first laws prohibiting the use of horse-drawn vehicles on public roads.



Figure 39