

# Porters, Chair Men & Sedan Chair Men

◆ ◆ ◆ ◆ ◆ by Ivan Green ◆ ◆ ◆ ◆ ◆

In the 19th century there were several privately provided but publicly controlled services, much like our modern taxis. One of these was the town's porters.

To quote from a local record of 1828: 'The employment of these porters, is to carry parcels to any part of the town, to attend funerals, and to carry the baggage of passengers, either to, or from the customs house, or to embark or land their horses, carriages, &c.

Each has a ticket, or number, and they form a regular establishment under the commissioners of the Paving Act, who have published the following rates of portage:

- For shipping or unshipping any horse, mare, mule or gelding is 1s 0d
- For shipping or unshipping of every carriage with two wheels. 5s 9d.
- For shipping any carriage with four wheels 10s. 6d.
- For every trunk, portmanteau, chest, box, bag, bundle, packet, or parcel, conveyed from any Inn to the Custom House, and from thence to or on board any boat, passenger vessel or packet boat, and conveyed to the Custom House, and from thence to any

Inn, or to the Custom House only, or direct to any Inn, or to any part of the town, not exceeding 28 lbs. wt. Os 6p.

- Above 28 lbs and not exceeding 56 lbs. 1s 0d.

- Above 56 lbs. and not exceeding 1 cwt is 1s 6d. Above 1 cwt. and not exceeding 2 cwt. 2s. 0d. Above 2 cwt. and not exceeding 3cwt. 3s. 0.

- For every additional half hundred cwt. 0. 6d.'

## CHAIR MEN

Chair men were the taxi men of the 1830's. Each had his own bath chair of wicker construction, with two large solid tyres like pram wheels at the rear and two small steerable wheels at the front, which the passenger controlled by means of a long lever.



*Yorick at Dover; going to embark for Calais*

On extreme left, two chair men carry a passenger aboard. Just left of centre, a town porter carries a parcel. Mrs Yorick does not seem very well dressed for what may be a stormy crossing. In background, sails and rigging of many ships in the harbour.

Each was inspected periodically by an employee of the council to ensure that it was serviceable and clean, and provided with a seat cushion and a rug. The owners were also inspected to ensure that they were 'sober, of good repute, respectably dressed and clean'. Any who failed inspection were prohibited from working. They were hired by time, the usual being a minimum of an hour.

Chairs were specially recommended 'for widows and matrons of forty years of age and above'. When such a lady went out to tea a chair man was hired and informed of the time when he was to return to take the lady home. Fastidious passengers could use their own cushion and rug if they wished, and were encouraged to report to the Commissioners of the Paving Act of any shortcomings in the service provided.

Regrettably some accidents did occur. For instance there is a record of 1830. A respected matron was being pushed down the rough track which later became

Durham Hill when the chair man stumbled and released the chair, which gathered speed and eventually deposited the respected matron on to the bank, displaying her naked lower limbs to the public gaze. A social disaster indeed!

One wonders what people of that time would have thought about our modern delightful bikini clad girls!

The provisions for porters appear to have lasted well into the 19th century, since in the Paving Act of 1810 it was the Commissioners who licensed 'porters and sedan chair men' though a provision was made to 'preserve the ancient rights of the mayor and jurats in respect of the old established town porters'. By this means the ancient rights of the mayor and jurats were added to those of the commissioners of the new paving acts.

This is the only reference I have been able to find of the officially approved use of sedan chairs in the town, but there may of course be others.

## B.O.O.K R.E.V.I.E.W *from Terry Sutton*

The Terror before Trafalgar - Nelson, Napoleon and the Secret War

*by Tom Pocock*

The part played by Dover and Deal in the secret war waged against Napoleon before Trafalgar is revealed in a new book just published. *The Terror before Trafalgar - Nelson, Napoleon and the Secret War* (James Murray: £20) tells how Walmer Castle (the official residence of the Lord Warden) became the hub of intelligence-gathering about French invasion plans against Britain. Author Tom Pocock, an authority on the life of Nelson, recalls the days when the Admiral's fleet was anchored off Deal and his trips ashore to rendezvous with Lady Emma Hamilton in the Royal Hotel (then called The Three Kings). British spies were

shipped out of Dover and Deal by former smugglers to glean information around the port of Boulogne where Napoleon's invasion fleet was building up. Experiments on new fangled weapons - submarines and mines - were carried out off Walmer Castle after being taken on board secretly at Dover. Traditional naval officers were disgusted at this kind of warfare with few realising the implications to Britannia's rule of the waves if the enemy copied these new weapons.

Anyone with an interest in the Napoleonic era, or the history of the Dover area, will find this book fascinating.