

# The Taxicab Accession: Democratization, Regulation, and the Rise of the Hired Coach

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The history of the London taxicab trade is not a glamorous one. The drivers of hackney coaches—as taxis were once called—were often seen as lowlifes who had a tendency to spit, curse at, and extort their fares. The riders were mostly middle- or upper-class members of society, and the coaches afforded them an opportunity for rapid transport and distance from the filth of the streets. In many cases, the rides were uncomfortable, dangerous, and even deadly. But the dilapidated coaches that plied for hire in the cobblestone streets of London circa the year 1600 were at the forefront of public transportation. They were faster and cleaner than walking, more convenient than a barge, and a novel and essential means of getting around London two hundred years before the advent of the omnibus. Yet little has been written about the early hackney coaches. One writer, G. N. Georgano, explains that this lack of coverage is because they fall into a certain grey area—public transportation historians think the taxi is in the class of private cars “while motorists regard it as a commercial vehicle.”<sup>1</sup> The story in this article is rarely considered an essential aspect of London’s history. Very

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<sup>1</sup> G. N. Georgano, *A History of the London Taxicab* (New York: Drake Publishers Inc., 1973), 11.

few books have been written on the subject of the hired car, and those that exist spend a great deal of time discussing technological advances after the late nineteenth century.<sup>2</sup> The early history follows a generally accepted plot, one which this article will not significantly challenge, although certain aspects will be elucidated. What is lacking in the historiography is an emphasis on just how controversial the hackney coaches were for their first hundred years.

The hackney coach represented a completely new era of transportation. Early coaches were accessible and cheap at a time when few but the most elite British families owned their own wheeled transportation. They were a revolution in travel and efficiency and the birth of a modern industry that helped to facilitate and spur London's expansion during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. They brought economic advancement and political power to a new class of people. In a word, the coaches can be considered symbolic of progress. And, like all evidence of progress, hackney coaches encountered significant resistance from the established transportation industry: the ferries. At the same time, Parliament instituted measures to rein in the new business and deter its unfettered growth, which would clog and damage the city's streets. What developed in the early seventeenth century—and is evidenced throughout the history of the hired coach—is the familiar conflict between progress and tradition. Hackney coaches represented social mobility and the democratization of travel. In turn, the coaches were reviled by the watermen and their allies and held in check by a wary and elitist government.

In order to illustrate the conflict, this article will take the form of two parts. The first, entitled "Progress," will deal with

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<sup>2</sup> These technological advances include the transition from the coach to its two-wheeled variety—the cab—in the 1830s, the advent of the motorcar, and the myriad differences between Austin and Beardmore cabs. One very detailed study of the unique London taxicab is Georgano's *A History of the London Taxicab*.

the raw history of the taxi business and the various social, political, and economic advances made by coach owners and operators. It will also discuss the later government protections for cab drivers and owners once the industry was begrudgingly accepted into the fabric of London. Part two, entitled “Resistance,” will deal with just the opposite: the resistance from the traditional order to the coach’s ascendancy and those laws that treated the cabmen as a serious social ill. There was a great deal of simultaneous tolerance and rejection, particularly by Parliament, and it is anticipated that the division between these two aspects—progress and resistance—will make a complicated issue somewhat clearer.

## Progress



Hackney coach circa 1680. Printed in Henry Charles Moore, *Omnibuses and Cabs: Their Origin and History* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1902), 189.

The first hired coaches designed for short-distance travel appeared in the yards of the more reputable inns of London in the early seventeenth century.<sup>3</sup> There was little difference between these coaches and the stagecoaches that were simultaneously establishing their predominance on England’s highways. While most people might have made a journey by

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<sup>3</sup> Henry Charles Moore, *Omnibuses and Cabs: Their Origin and History* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1902), 183.

stage perhaps once in their lives, the hackney coaches—as they were quickly becoming known—catered to local travel and were available to anyone with a few pence in their pockets. While they were by no means free, they quickly became a necessary expense for many of London’s middle and upper classes who did not want to deal with the filth of the street or the expense of keeping horses. Some early writers on the subject of hackney coaches put their birth in the year 1625; however, their true origin must have been years earlier because by 1623, it was estimated that up to five hundred people were employing them instead of a ferry each day.<sup>4</sup> This was a virtually instantaneous transition to a new, more convenient form of travel—one that was readily available and soon to be so ubiquitous as to require culling.

The coaches moved out of the inn-yards before 1635. Their presence on London’s major thoroughfares indicated that the owners were actively seeking out new customers, in addition to foreign or northern visitors. Hackney coaches were soon available to residents (albeit upper class ones) who simply needed to get to work or the theater. The commonly told story—like a folktale to the modern cabby—is the origin of the taxi line (or rank) as the brainchild of one Captain Baily.<sup>5</sup> Baily was likely a former sea captain in Sir Walter Raleigh’s final expedition. His ship was *The Husband*, and Baily was a deserter who left Raleigh’s fleet after a disagreement with the great explorer. Baily had purloined a few items from a French vessel,

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<sup>4</sup> Samuel Pegge, “Dissertation on Coaches,” *Curialia Miscellania or Anecdotes of Old Times; Regal, Noble, Gentilitia, and Miscellaneous: Including Authentic Anecdotes of the Royal Household, and the Customs of the Court, at an Early Period of the British History* (Westminster: J. Nichols, Son, and Bently, 1818), 269–304, 284; this source states definitively that the hackney coach “took birth A. D. 1625”—yet sources published as early as 1623 directly reference hackney coaches.

<sup>5</sup> Baily’s name is spelled differently in various sources: sometimes Bailey, Baylie, or Bayly. In this article, I will use Baily.

and Raleigh demanded he pay the French their value. The captain became incensed and turned *The Husband* back to England. Once home and under questioning for desertion, he began a campaign against Raleigh in Raleigh's absence and was later acquitted at trial through the timely intervention of the Spanish ambassador in 1618.<sup>6</sup> Sixteen years later this same Baily was the owner of four hackney coaches whose drivers were instructed to wait by the Maypole in the Strand. Baily's coaches charged a fixed rate set by Baily himself, and the rank of coaches soon grew to include many followers that charged the same rate. The rank seems to have made quite an impact, and in the words of one observer—a man named Garrard—"Everybody is much pleased with it; for, whereas, before, coaches could not be had but at greater rates, now a man may have one much cheaper."<sup>7</sup> The standardization of cabs gave customers a sense of continuity between drivers and, over time, greatly contributed to the normalization of hiring a coach. The bargain of hiring a coach on an ad hoc basis versus keeping horses, coach, stable, and driver on retainer further endeared the industry to the thrifty and space-challenged residents of London. Lastly, while Garrard may have referred elsewhere to Baily's rank as "trivial," the earmarking of various locations for taxi ranks would grow to play a significant role in their regulation. Parliaments over the next century were forced to gradually expand the list of places where hackney coaches could stand as London grew and the government allowed more coaches—the Maypole rank was always among that list.

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<sup>6</sup> Captain John Baily's story is pieced together from Raleigh Trevelyan, *Sir Walter Raleigh* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 2014) and Edward Edwards, *The Life of Raleigh* (London: Macmillan and Company, 1868). For the reason for Baily's desertion, see Trevelyan, 477. For his campaign against Raleigh, see Trevelyan, 479–81 and Edwards, 606, 612–14, 618. For his acquittal at trial, see Edwards, 640.

<sup>7</sup> Moore, *Omnibuses*, 184–85.

The trade was an instantaneous success. No records exist for the daily or yearly earnings of the average driver or owner, but through circumstantial evidence, we can determine that not only was the trade lucrative, it was competitive. Being in the hackney coach trade was highly desirable. It provided extraordinary financial benefits to the owners of the carriages and even the lowly drivers. In the mid-seventeenth century, the government began to require that hackney coaches be licensed. As of 1662, four hundred such licenses were issued to owners of hackney coaches, who were granted the privilege of paying a yearly rent to a commission under the Office of Works for the purpose of repaving several vital streets and highways within the city. To the letter of the law: “Every Coach so licensed...shall pay...the yearely [*sic*] Rent of five pounds.” In order to operate a hackney coach within the “Parishes comprised within the Bills of Mortality” (the boundary of the commission’s jurisdiction), one needed to be one of the lucky four hundred.<sup>8</sup> Had the hackney coach business not been so remunerative, this would have been an extremely high tax—even prohibitively high. On the contrary, the licenses were eagerly sought after. This is shown through a very healthy aftermarket trade. By 1715, the majority of the original four hundred had sold their licenses directly to new buyers for more than one hundred pounds each (the initial licensing fee was only forty shillings), bypassing the commission altogether. The purchasers were forced to “[sell] Lands of Inheritance, and [disinherit] their children, to enable them to

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<sup>8</sup> “Charles II, 1662: An Act for repairing the High wayes and Sewers and for paving and keeping clean of the Streets in and about the Cities of London & Westminster and for reforming of Annoyances and Disorders in the Streets of and places adjacent to the said Cities and for the Regulating and Licensing of [Hackey] Coaches and for the enlarging of several strait & inconvenient Streets and Passages,” in *Statutes of the Realm*, ed. John Raithby, vol. 5, 1628–80 (London: Great Britain Record Commission, 1819), 351–57.

make such Purchases.”<sup>9</sup> Presumably, the new owners were glad to pay such a steep price. In 1662, the standard fare for twelve hours of service set by Parliament (as opposed to the free market) was a full ten shillings.<sup>10</sup>

The hackney coach trade created a whole new class of successful businessmen who were willing to go to any lengths to remain in their chosen trade. As each Parliament transitioned into a new government, the hackney coach laws expired and new ones were written. Largely, they followed the same standard format as the 1662 regulation: some loose governing body issued licenses and rent was paid to that commission either for the salaries of the commissioners or some other purpose. Trouble came and the owners’ desperation for licenses became evident during the transitional periods when new commissioners were taking over their duties. Priority was supposed to be given to coachmen that had been licensed previously, but in reality, things did not always work out as the lawmakers intended.

As the reign of Charles II turned to the reign of William and Mary, there were dramatic examples of hackney coach owners running up against corrupt commissioners and taking their complaints to Parliament. In 1695, at least nineteen of the “ancient Hackney Coachmen” were denied licenses or extorted for bribes by the new commission.<sup>11</sup> One man, William Ball, was told by a commissioner named Villers to pay a bribe of 65£ to renew his license and, after he did, was still denied. When Ball returned to the commissioner’s home to demand his money back, Villers’s wife asked to see his old license and tried to steal

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<sup>9</sup> *Some Reasons most humbly offered to the consideration of the Right Honourable House of Lords, and the Right Honourable House of Commons; by all the 700 hackney coachmen and their widows, to enable them to pay the great tax laid upon them* (London, 1715).

<sup>10</sup> “Charles II, 1662,” in Raithby, *Statutes of the Realm*, 351–57.

<sup>11</sup> The number of complainants were likely dozens more than these; however, the records of the House of Commons only list nineteen names followed by the phrase “divers others.”

it, presumably to tear up the evidence. A fight ensued between Ball and Villers's footmen, and after a sardonic interjection by the Swedish ambassador (also present, he asked, after the coachman's mouth was stopped, "if they intended to murder him"), the money was returned and Ball was allowed to leave.<sup>12</sup> It is important to note that 65£ was more money than it cost to buy a coach in the first place.<sup>13</sup> There is no better evidence as to the profitability of the trade than the coachmen's determination to remain coachmen.

The economic advantages provided by the coach trade also encouraged the breaking down of political barriers. Throughout the eighteenth century, hackney coach owners and drivers routinely exercised their political rights and strove for fair and just treatment under the law. Ball's confrontation came to light during a session of Parliament after which a special committee determined that three of the commissioners (including Villers) had acted corruptly and were removed from the commission.<sup>14</sup> Coachmen routinely petitioned against, or simply flouted, laws made to limit their number or their freedom to operate. The response to a 1635 proclamation that placed stringent prerequisites on operating coaches is particularly telling. After King Charles I refused two offers of compromise from a group of one hundred coachmen who wanted to form a corporation, the 1635 regulation was wholly ignored.<sup>15</sup> In 1636, a satirical pamphlet was published, entitled *Coach and Sedan, Pleasantly Disputing for Place and Precedence*, that illustrated the contemporary situation. The author noted that a friend of his could "neither sleepe [n]or studie for the clattering of Coaches"

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<sup>12</sup> "Hackney Coach Commissioners," in *Journal of the House of Commons*, vol. 11, 1693–1697 (London: His Majesty's Stationary Office, 1803), 259–63.

<sup>13</sup> Georgano, *A History*, 23–24.

<sup>14</sup> "Hackney Coach Commissioners," 277–78.

<sup>15</sup> Georgano, *A History*, 15–16.



at the very height of Charles I's "prohibition."<sup>16</sup> Less than thirty years later, in 1660, a proclamation from Charles II attempted to confine the hackney coaches to "their respective Coach-houses, Stables, and Yards."<sup>17</sup> Samuel Pepys, in his diary, notes almost one month later that "this was the first day of the King's Proclamation against hackney coaches coming into the streets to stand to be hired, yet I got one to carry me home."<sup>18</sup>

Coachmen were emboldened by early regulation that created a sense of community amongst licensed owners. Thirty years after Charles I's rejection of incorporation, regulations by Oliver Cromwell's government called for a committee of thirteen coach owners to nominate the remainder of the "Master Hackney-Coachmen."<sup>19</sup> While this particular feature did not carry over into later laws, it is easy to imagine the effect that this had on the hackney coach industry. If hackney coach owners were held liable for each other, this proto-unionizing would have led to a sense of responsibility and bonding between these businessmen and to the kind of cooperative bargaining that has been seen in the industry over the subsequent centuries.

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<sup>16</sup> Henry Peacham, "To the Reader," in *Coach and Sedan, Pleasantly Disputing for Place and Precedence the Brewers-Cart being Moderator* (London: Robert Raworth, 1636),

<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo/A09194.0001.001/1:3?rgn=div1;view=toc>.

<sup>17</sup> By the King. A Proclamation to Restrain the Abuses of Hackney Coaches in the Cities of London and Westminster and the Suburbs Thereof, 1660, 11 & 12 Car. 2.

<sup>18</sup> Samuel Pepys, "7 November 1660," in *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*, <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/4125>.

<sup>19</sup> "June 1654: An Ordinance for the Regulation of Hackney-Coachmen in London and the places adjacent," in *Acts and Ordinances of the Interregnum* (London: His Majesty's Stationary Office, 1911), <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/no-series/acts-ordinances-interregnum/pp922-924>.

Only five years after the formation of this “union,” drivers ignored Charles II’s 1660 banishment from the streets. In 1663, the widows of dead coachmen appealed to Parliament for relief and were given priority in the distribution of new licenses.<sup>20</sup> In 1715, the (by then) seven hundred licensed coachmen petitioned Parliament and requested some changes to the rules. They asked that “no Gentlemens [*sic*] Servants...be allowed to Assist the Undertakers at Funerals with Mourning-Coaches without a license,” a clause that was indeed included in another act passed in 1716.<sup>21</sup> Further, they asked that their coaches and horses be defined as “Goods and Chattels,” thereby exempting them from working on the Lord’s Day (established in 1677—An Act for the better Observation of the Lord’s Day) and “[obliging them] to live as becometh Christians.”<sup>22</sup> In future acts, the industry was referred to as a trade in goods and chattel, and, presumably, drivers were no longer required to make themselves available on Sundays. The crux of their petition seems to have been ignored—commissioners were still responsible for the seizure of licenses in arrears—but many of the seven hundred’s requests were acceded to. Fifty years later, in 1760, the coachmen threatened to strike on George III’s coronation day. Eventually, cabmen did go on strike in the year 1853, but they were thwarted by the police who allowed unlicensed cabs to work for the duration of the strike.<sup>23</sup> After 1853, coachmen routinely went on strike or threatened to strike every few years or so.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> This 1663 petition is referenced in a note written by either Lord Braybrooke or Henry B. Wheatley (editors of Pepys’ handwritten manuscript) on Pepys’ entry of 7 November 1660 (see note 18). The source cited for the note is Ruge’s *Diurnal*.

<sup>21</sup> *Some Reasons most humbly offered* (1715); An Act for better Regulating Hackney Coaches, Carts Drays, Carrs, and Waggons, 1716, 2 & 3 Geo. 2.

<sup>22</sup> *Some Reasons most humbly offered* (1715).

<sup>23</sup> Moore, *Omnibuses*, 232–33.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 250.

Regardless of the limited success of these actions, the coachmen were successful in making their grievances heard, and Parliament routinely accepted a reasonable portion of them. This early political organizing can be seen in a number of contemporary industries. Hackney coachmen were by no means the first to use collective action techniques, but the hackney coach industry brought direct political involvement to a large number of drivers and owners who had routine access to the ruling class.

As we will see later, many critics of the hackney coach industry portrayed their customers as transgressors of the social structure. People who rode in hackney coaches were painted as social climbers desperate to imitate the elite classes, and, in reality, some of them were. But their imitation was only a thin veneer of status while the hackney coach industry provided real advancement to another class of people: the drivers. We have seen already how the hackney coach industry served as a platform for drivers and owners to exercise political rights in the form of petitions and strikes. We have also seen how the drivers and the owners of coaches stood to make a significant financial gain even at the risk of their homes and estates. Drivers also benefitted in social standing. For example, they were granted access to the elites on a daily basis. One story, as told by transportation writer Henry Charles Moore, illustrates that regular users of coaches were upper-class members of London society. “Lord John Russell was in the habit of riding home every night from the House of Commons in a cab.” When the Lord accidentally paid his driver a sovereign instead of a shilling, he was able to identify his driver the next day. The sovereign had already been spent, and Lord Russell did not demand it back, but this story and others demonstrate the mostly friendly nature of the interactions between the drivers and their regular fares.<sup>25</sup> If one was not a regular customer, however, one could expect no special treatment from the drivers. When drivers found

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<sup>25</sup> Moore, *Omnibuses*, 239–40.

themselves in positions of power, they often extorted their fares for extra money. For example, when Tate Wilkinson was unable to get a coach in the tangle of theatre-goers departing the Drury Lane Theatre, he was asked to pay eight shillings for what was probably a one shilling ride. Mr. Wilkinson was so grateful anyway that he threw in a “bumper” of brandy as a tip.<sup>26</sup> Drivers knew that their riders were generally well off and used their access to extort them or play on their generosity and wealth. Their status was also cemented by the fact that many coaches were the cast-offs of the superrich. Coaches that originally cost fortunes were sold very cheaply secondhand and still displayed the original owners’ coats of arms on the sides.<sup>27</sup> This was one way in which social climbers could pretend to hold the status of the wealthy (and many did), but the coachmen owned these coaches and made additional money by having a well-known crest on the door.<sup>28</sup> Drivers used their newfound social status—as the wielders of wheels—to their own advantage in any way they could, and for a while, it was even considered trendy for women to fawn over coach drivers as if they were rock stars.<sup>29</sup>

## Resistance



Wenceslaus Hollar, *Plan of London Before the Fire, State 2, Variant*,  
The Wenceslaus Hollar Digital Archive, University of Toronto.

<sup>26</sup> Georgano, *A History*, 22–23.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>28</sup> Moore, *Omnibuses*, 188–89.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 196.

The nature of any new industry requires, to some degree, that it upsets the traditional order. The hackney coach industry was no different. There were significant and established interests in London's transportation industry before the coaches came along, and those interests had much to say about the newcomers. The watermen were the established order and most similar preexisting industry to the coaches; ferries could be hired to deliver the wealthy up and down the river Thames. The watermen made a good deal of money this way, and the original hackney coaches were a significant threat to their business. Protests began in the early 1620s. John Taylor, known as the waterman poet, wrote a number of pamphlets bemoaning the sorry state that the hackney coaches had brought to his business. As mentioned in part one, it was in his pamphlet *The World Runnes on Wheels* that Taylor insisted that the coaches "do rob us of our livings and carry 500 fares daily from us." He argued that the majority of Londoners using any ad hoc transportation were people of quality, especially members of Parliament. The hackney coaches had supplanted the watermen's access to the ruling class, and for this, the watermen were embittered. The coaches were "a prowde, sawcie Intruder...[that] hath driven many honest Families out of their Houses, many Knights to Beggars,...and all Earthly goodness almost to an utter confusion."<sup>30</sup> Of course, Taylor was being hyperbolic, but his complaints came from a legitimate place. The world was changing, and the watermen were being left behind.

Hackney coaches were seen as bringing status to a lower class of people. Early in their history, contemporaneous ballads and stories were written that characterized the hackney coach as being a tool of Satan. Taylor capitalized upon—or perhaps invented—this impression in his pamphlet. The title page of *The World Runnes on Wheels* shows an image of a globe-shaped carriage

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<sup>30</sup> John Taylor, *The World Runnes on Wheels* (London: E. A. for Henry Gosson, 1623), <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo/A13524.0001.001>.

being pulled by the Devil with pointed tongue, horns, and tail and a prostitute referred to as “the Flesh.”



Frontispiece from Taylor, *The World Runnes on Wheels*.

This impression was partially based in reality, as hackney carriages were sometimes used in the effectuation of extramarital trysts.<sup>31</sup> However, in the early days, this use was only hypothetical, while the association of hackney coaches with hell was rampant. “Hyred Hackney hell-Carts” was Taylor’s phrase. Another writer, Henry Peacham, referred to a coach as a “Devills Carter.”<sup>32</sup> A ballad written at some time in the late seventeenth century gave the “true Relation of one Thomas Cox, a Hackney-Coach-man, to whom the Devil appeared on friday Night.”<sup>33</sup> The association with prostitution was a charge often

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<sup>31</sup> *The Trial of Mrs. Eliz. Leslie Christie, Daughter of the Late Sir William Baird, Bart. of Saughton Hall, and Wife of James Christie, Esquire, Capt. in the Late 88th Regiment of Foot, And Son of Major General Christie; For Committing Adultery with Joseph Baker, Esq; And Violating Her Conjugal Vow* (London, 1783).

<sup>32</sup> Henry Peacham, *Coach and Sedan Pleasantly Disputing*.

<sup>33</sup> *Mans Amazement: It being a true Relation of one Thomas Cox, a Hackney-Coach-man, to whom the Devil appeared on friday night, it being the 31st of*

levied against the hackney coaches. A ballad penned in 1684 to celebrate the end of the frost and the opening of the Thames to the watermen stated that hackney coaches were “where Whores do debauch,” and they had “spoiled [the Thames’] Grace.”<sup>34</sup> Throughout the seventeenth century, the traditional order fought the hackney coachmen for the hearts and minds of the citizens of London, using stories and songs to influence the people against the coaches by portraying them as a tool of Satan and sin. Because of their democratic availability, the hackney coaches were a direct threat to tradition and social order, and understandably, there was significant resistance to them.

One of the early complaints, however, hit home with the more practical British government: the streets were too crowded and in sorry condition, and it was the hackney coaches’ fault. According to Charles I in 1635, “the great number of Hackney Coaches of late time seen and kept in London...were not only *a great disturbance to his Majesty, . . . the Queen, the Nobility, and others of place and degree* . . . but the streets themselves were so pestered, and the pavements so broken up, that the common passage [was] thereby hindered and made dangerous.”<sup>35</sup> Accompanying this lambaste were severe restrictions that the king hoped would slow down the hackney coach trade before it did any real damage. Hackney coaches would only be “suffered” in London if they were traveling more than three miles out of the city—making them no different than the stage coaches. Furthermore, by the Crown’s right of purveyance, nobody

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*October, first in the likeness of a Gentleman, seeming to have a role of Paper or Parchment in his hand, afterwards in the likeness of a great Bear with glaring eyes, which so affrighted him, that it deprived him of all his Sences* (London: I. Deacon, 1671–1702),

<http://ebba.english.ucsb.edu/ballad/20792/citation>.

<sup>34</sup> *The Thames Uncas’d: Or, The Watermans Song upon the Thaw* (1684), <http://ebba.english.ucsb.edu/ballad/32187/citation>.

<sup>35</sup> Pegge, “Dissertation on Coaches,” 285–86.

would be allowed to ride in any coach unless the owner was able to keep four additional able horses on hand at all times for the exclusive use of the Crown.

These prerequisites were extremely burdensome, and the 1635 regulations were unsuccessful at halting the hackney coaches' growth. Instead of coaches, Charles I wanted the wealthy to travel in sedan chairs—curtained chairs carried by two men. To read *The Coaches Overthrow*, a ballad from 1636, it



Example of a sedan chair. "Sedan Chairmen," last modified February 2004, <http://www.georgianindex.net/transportationLondon/chairmen.html>.

would seem that London was in exaltation over the banishment of hackney coaches; everyone, from brewers to the infirm, was celebrating the rise of the sedan chair and the clearing of the streets.<sup>36</sup> Unfortunately for Sanders Duncombe, the patent holder on the sedan, the vehicle was highly impractical, limited by the speed of the men carrying it and by the fact it could carry only one passenger, leading to the hackney coaches' revival before the year was out.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> *The Coaches Overthrow. Or, A Joviall Exaltation of divers Tradesmen, and others, for the suppression of troublesome Hackney Coaches* (1636), <http://ebba.english.ucsb.edu/ballad/30361/citation>.

<sup>37</sup> Peacham, "To the Reader"; as mentioned before, at the time of this pushback against the hackney coaches, there were still so many in the streets that Peacham's friend could "neither sleep [n]or studie for [their] clattering."



Unfazed by his failure, Charles I issued a compromise in 1637: fifty hackney coachmen were allowed to keep twelve horses each. Assuming this did not completely cancel out the previous law, four of the twelve horses would have to be kept aside, resulting in a total of two hundred legal coaches in London.<sup>38</sup> In 1654, that number was raised to three hundred, and in 1662, it was raised again to four hundred.<sup>39</sup> Whether or not this policy of begrudging acceptance worked is a matter for debate. It is difficult to fathom that there were *no* illegal coaches, and one source (referencing Rugge's *Diurnal*) says that there were roughly two thousand hackney coaches in London as of 1660.<sup>40</sup> Regardless of the actual numbers, it is clear that members of the government were not about to let the free market run wild in London; they felt it their duty to serve as a check on this burgeoning business.

There was also government resistance to the economic benefits of the coaches. When Oliver Cromwell proposed licensing coachmen, he also required that they pay a one-time licensing fee of forty shillings. When the monarchy was restored and new laws were issued, Charles II continued issuing licenses but changed the one-time fee to a yearly rent of five pounds. The justification was virtually the same as thirty years earlier: the sorry condition of the streets. This tax on coachmen went directly into defraying the costs of repaving several vital thoroughfares. But for the coachmen, this was a one hundred and fifty percent increase in overhead year after year. The number of licenses was no longer the only limiting factor—it became exorbitantly expensive to maintain one's license. This was elitist legislation that turned the hackney coach industry from an easy avenue by which to change one's social status into

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<sup>38</sup> Pegge, "Dissertation on Coaches," 291–92.

<sup>39</sup> "June 1654," *Acts and Ordinances of the Interregnum*; and "Charles II 1662," in Raithby, *Statutes of the Realm*, vol. 5, 1628–80.

<sup>40</sup> See note 20, above.

an industry with its own traditionalist order. No longer could small businessmen afford to own only one coach; if one was to be a licensed coachman, one had to be involved in big business. This same elitism was seen in the nineteenth century when the two-wheeled “cabriolet”—cab, for short—was invented. For a time, a cab was licensed separately from a coach, and coach owners were prohibited from owning them; it is no surprise that the principle owners of cabs for the first few years were themselves aristocrats.<sup>41</sup>

In addition, Charles II dictated a number of specific routes and their costs. The routes were all notable in that they began or ended at the Inns of Court and other elite establishments.<sup>42</sup> The precise motivation for the government setting aside these routes as special is unclear; however, it is most likely that government officials and other elites (lawyers, bankers, people of status) wanted to be sure that their daily routine would not be disrupted by a driver demanding one extra penny.

## Conclusion

Seventeenth century London was a turning point in transportation. For millennia, England’s roads hosted only men, horses, chattel animals, and the occasional cart. In 1620, while coaches had long been available to the ultra-rich, access was dictated by status. The advent of the hireable coach brought comfortable and rapid transportation to the middle class. The elite, who wanted to retain travel for their own use, saw this as a threat. Thus, Parliament dictated the fares to be charged and the places coaches could rank. They incentivized travel within London’s center and standardized travel to and from elite areas like Westminster, the Tower, and the Inns of Court. Drivers and owners of coaches used their newfound political influence to petition for their rights as businessmen. Still, there were those

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<sup>41</sup> Georgano, *A History*, 28.

<sup>42</sup> “Charles II 1662,” in Raithby, *Statutes of the Realm*, vol. 5, 1628–80.

that resented the hackney's ascendancy; the watermen felt the brunt of the burden in lost profits, and the ferry business was never able to recover. The hackney coach brought a status-linked mode of transportation to the masses, democratizing rapid transit and yielding untold economic benefits to the owners and drivers of coaches. As time went on, drivers used their newfound economic status to cement social benefits and political rights.

In the 1800s in London, the drivers themselves began to be licensed, not just their vehicles. New rules were established concerning the drivers' personal conduct—their tendencies to curse, spit, and extort were prohibited by law.<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, they needed to be held to a high standard of ability—leading to the noted “Knowledge Examination.” In the aftermath of the Great Exhibition in 1851, drivers were discovered to be relatively incompetent in their understanding of the more minute intricacies of London's complex geography. Soon after, they were required to pass an examination that tested them regarding that knowledge.<sup>44</sup> Candidates had to recite to an examiner the roads that made up the fastest route between two points of the examiner's choosing. This distinctive oral format had its origin in the standardization of rates by Parliament. By setting a price based on a beginning and end point rather than on mileage, Parliament effectively established the preeminence of the “most efficient route” as opposed to the travel time or the distance.

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<sup>43</sup> “Abstract of Laws: General Guidance on Hackney Carriage Law for London's Licensed Taxi Drivers,” Transport for London, last modified January 2013, 15–16, <http://content.tfl.gov.uk/taxi-drivers-abstract-of-laws.pdf>.

<sup>44</sup> Jody Rosen, “The Knowledge, London's Legendary Taxi-Driver Test,” *T Magazine*, November 10, 2014, <http://tmagazine.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/11/10/london-taxi-test-knowledge/>.

Hired cars have been a staple of Western culture for centuries, but resistance to coaches, cabs, and taxis continues to the modern day. The cost of a license to “ply-for-hire” as a taxi driver is still prohibitively high: a “medallion” in New York City costs, on average, eight hundred forty thousand dollars.<sup>45</sup> Newer and even more democratic services like Uber are meeting strong resistance from local governments and the established order of taxi and minicab drivers on both sides of the Atlantic.

After their first century, coaches no longer represented a cutting-edge industry. It is doubtful that anyone today would see a taxi as a bastion of democratization. However, for the people of seventeenth century London, the hackney coach was a symbol of their yearning to belong to a higher socio-economic station. From the outside, the coach industry equalized a larger body of people: an observer would never know if the occupant of a coach was a member of Parliament or a simple tailor. For the owners and the drivers, however, the trade provided a tangible economic benefit that they parleyed into real political rights.

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<sup>45</sup> Josh Barro, “New York Taxi Medallion Prices Fall Again,” *The New York Times*, December 2, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/03/upshot/new-york-taxi-medallion-prices-fall-again.html?abt=0002&abg=1>.