

Getting about

MY recent definition, for the benefit of a New Zealand family researcher, of a "hay-binder" has prompted an Australian correspondent to fire a somewhat similar query at me. "Do you, or does your great-grandfather, know what a cab-runner was?" Both of us can answer Yes; myself from hearsay and he from observation.

Great-grandfather William recalls that coaching inns, and later railway stations, (he lived in the transition period between the two) were frequented by a man of somewhat rascally appearance who offered, for a tip, to take charge of the luggage of a disembarking passenger and stow it in a cab. He then hung around to hear the passenger's instructions to the cabby. Sure enough, when the cab arrived at its destination, there would be the same character, waiting to unload the luggage and so earn another tip.

One supposes that if necessary the man was prepared to run by the side of the cab, a feasible operation on a short journey through town streets, but he much preferred to cadge a ride on the back axle of the cab. A standard design was for cabs and carriages in general to have an exposed back axle. As a boy, in the last days of the supremacy of horse-drawn vehicles I remember often hearing the cry "Whip behind!" shouted by nosy-parkers to inform the drivers that boys were cadging a ride at the vehicle's tail. We exploited any kind of vehicle, but it must have been much easier, not to say irresistible, when a convenient back axle was on offer.

We did it, of course, for fun, but for the luggage-handler it was part of his workaday routine. Fortunately for him, most cabs were so constructed that the driver could not see the rear of the vehicle, so for him too the only peril was a cry of "Whip behind!" He hardly deserved the name, *cab-runner*, but that is what he was called.

He was, of course, unpopular with cab-drivers, who had no hesitation about plying that whip. Some of them employed that more reliable deterrent of keeping a Dalmatian dog to run between the wheels of the cab.

A few years ago I remember writing of the arrival of a new village neighbour whose family included a Dalmatian dog. It wasn't long before the dog discovered that our village had a flourishing horse population. In particular, it attached itself to a stable of three ponies, whose owners were rather amused at their new acquisition and were happy to encour-

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age it. In due course they also acquired a nice little light two-wheeled trap for use on our country lanes, and the Dalmatian naturally accompanied them on their excursions, trotting between the wheels.

Owners of Dalmatians have told me that the dogs can readily trot along with horses for fifteen or twenty miles a day without tiring. There is a record of a Dalmatian in coaching days who ran with a coach for the fifty miles from London to Brighton for eight consecutive days. There is a suspicion, though, that like the cab-runner it cadged a lift from time to time.

A handsome spotted dog running behind one's carriage must have

bull terrier and letting the animal take the Dalmatian's place as carriage escort. In the ensuing rumpus the village dogs learned a lesson they never forgot! From that time the Dalmatian was left in peace.

The origins of the Dalmatian are unrecorded. They seem to have had no connection with Dalmatia. The fact that seventeenth century Puritans were prejudiced against it as a "papist dog" suggests a possible Italian origin.

In the West Country we used to call them "plum pudding dogs". That sounds like a humorous reference to their spots, but West Country folk used to have a deep-rooted objection to using the word "spotted". Somerset has a breed of spotted horses which, it is claimed, have a history reaching back to at least early Saxon times. They are white horses with either black or red spots, but no native Somerset man would ever refer to them as "black-spotted" or "red-spotted". There were either "roans" or "greys".

I once asked a breeder how he would describe a spotted horse to someone who had never seen one, and, after thinking hard, he would say "one marked like yourn"! My guess is that long ago these distinctively marked horses were once held sacred to some pagan god and were therefore regarded with disapproval by the Church.

A local name for them in Somerset is "Merriott transters". Merriott was long the headquarters of the breed, and it is suggested that "transters" is an abbreviation for "transporters". Which I doubt. However, the taboo on the use of the word "spotted" was not universal, for on the edge of the Mendips Somerset has an inn bearing the name "The Spotted Horse".

By Ralph Whitlock

added distinction to the outfit, but practical considerations also existed. Within living memory the only form of public transport on Guernsey was horse-buses. The roads being so tortuous and narrow, the buses were accompanied by Dalmatians. For most of the journeys the dogs ran some distance in front of the vehicle, to warn other vehicles and pedestrians of its approach, but on the infrequent wider and straighter stretches they would fall back and run behind the bus.

The belief that the Dalmatian has lost its sense of smell is a myth, but the breed takes little interest in the world of scent, even tending to ignore other dogs. It is also a rather timid dog. I was once told of a Hampshire Dalmatian who, following his master's carriage, was habitually set upon by the village dogs. His owner eventually dealt with the problem by painting black spots on his white

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