

Travelling to the theatre

Horse and cab

When the theatre opened in 1907, horse and cab was still a common means of private transport for wealthy people. The front cover of early Hippodrome programmes shows a line of cabs queuing up in front of the elaborate, wrought iron canopy under which the more affluent clients would use - sheltering them from any rain and wind. Chauffeured cars would soon begin to replace horse-drawn cabs.

Within the resources we've provided you'll see evidence of the use of horse-drawn vehicles in:

- Early theatre programme adverts in which some places advertise 'good stabling'.
- Old photographs showing cabs and carts along Parkgate.
- Ward's 1915 street directory for Borough Road (around the corner from the theatre) mentions a hay and straw dealer living at no. 15, a cab proprietor at no. 67, a hay cutter at no. 72, blacksmiths at nos. 50 and 54, and a cart man at no. 44. These are all professions that supported travel and delivery using horse-drawn vehicles.

Bicycle

Many working class people would have walked to the theatre; others came by bike as the theatre offered free cycle storage. Look for evidence of cycling activity in:

- The small print at the bottom of the show line up in the Hippodrome programmes which offers 'Cycles stored free of charge'. Within the programmes, look for adverts referring to cycles – purchase, hire and repairs.
- The Ward's 1915 Directory, where you'll see that the cycle maker at no. 7 Parkgate lived just around the corner at no. 53 Borough Road.
- The photographs of Parkgate over time.

Trams and trolley buses

Darlington opened its electric tramway system on 1st June 1907 – it was one of the first in the country. One of its routes was from the railway station into town – passing the theatre.

Twenty-four trams, powered by overhead electric wires, operated on just under five miles of track. In 1926, these were changed to trolleybuses which didn't need tracks and could therefore expand further into the town using just overhead wires. The old tram tracks were dug up. At their peak, 66 trolleybuses operated over 12 miles, making it easier for even more people to come into town. Then in 1957, they, too, were replaced - by buses. The overhead wires were taken down ².

The 1915 map shows the co-existence of many forms of transport – horse-power, rail, tram and motor cars. Evidence you'll see includes:

- Tramlines in front of the theatre and the tramway depot – at the north end of Borough Road
- The theatre's proximity to the railway station and the station's massive presence at the top of the hill
- A large motor garage.

Our research has uncovered a series of photographs – taken from virtually the same position in Parkgate that captures these changes in transport as well other changes on the street.

A volunteer from the Aycliffe and District Bus Preservation Society has sourced 1974 bus timetables, ticket prices and route maps around Darlington, including services that passed by the Hippodrome. You'll find these in the Resources Folder [Transport].

² Information from *Darlington Trolleybuses*, Lockwood, S., 2004, Middleton Press.

