

Coach Service

Jenny Parrott

The coach service between Hobart Town and Brown's River, passing through present day Tarroona, commenced in 1845. Woods *Van Diemen's Land Almanack* of 1846 lists

Brown's River Daily Conveyance (Fisher's) from the Rising Sun, Hobart Town and the Retreat Inn, Brown's River at 8.30am and 4.30 pm. On Sunday from each place at 9.30 am and 2.30 pm. Fares 2s.

The "conveyance" initially was a cab with a dickey behind and in the early days carried the mail as well. In 1849 the Mail contract, worth £20 a year, was given to Mr J. Fisher. In 1913 one of the original coach drivers, Mr Tom Lucas, recalled that "during all the time he has been associated with the mail service, no serious accident has happened, and he has no tales of being 'held up' by bearded bushrangers"¹. Brown's River road, which was completed in 1845, was built with convict labour and provided a much needed link with Hobart Town. There was a toll gate, or turnpike, on the road in Sandy Bay which charged varying amounts for the type and number of animals. A horse cost one pence, and

Id. for each wheel of every vehicle drawn by any animal, exclusive of the rate for such animal or animals drawing the same; such animal or vehicles to be exempt from toll on return through the same toll bar once on the same day².

The road was managed by a Board of Trustees who were responsible for the erection of toll bars and collection of money for the repair and maintenance of the road. In 1848 it was intended to move the toll bar to the southern end of Sandy Bay beach and a petition was organised against the move as it would have given the rich free access to Sandy Bay beach and made the poor farmers and settlers pay to get into Hobart Town. The Turnpike was not moved and remained in operation until the 1860s. Certain vehicles were exempt from the toll charge, including mail carriers. The road was not without some hazards:

October 29 1861

Sir,

Will you kindly allow me through the medium of your columns to draw the attention of the

police at Sandy Bay to a most intolerable nuisance existing in that locality.

I allude to the number of curs (chiefly between the toll-gate and Mr. Window's residence) which rush out two and three at a time to chase any horses that may be passing. I need hardly point out how dangerous this is to equestrians, especially to ladies. I may, however, state that I know of one case that occurred very recently in the locality I have mentioned, when a horse bolted and became entirely unmanageable from being chased by these curs.

Trusting that this annoyance may be speedily put a stop to³.

However, even given the good, well maintained road, the magnificent scenery and the uneventful running of the service for 55 years, the journey from Hobart Town to Brown's River must have been quite a trip. Fisher's Coach left from the "Rising Sun Inn" for the first year of its operations and then transferred to the "Derwent Hotel" in Murray Street. The old "Rising Sun Inn" was built in 1827 on the corner of Criterion and Bathurst Streets. It gradually drifted into disrepute and was delicensed in 1829⁴. The old building was finally demolished in 1953.

The original coach owner, Mr Joseph Fisher of the "Retreat Inn" at Brown's River, besides being a very colorful character, was also known as "One-arm Fisher", from the fact that he had "lost an arm, while driving, through an accidental gun-shot"⁵. Mr Tom Lucas recalled that:

Old Joe Fisher met with the accident which deprived him of an arm at the Retreat Farm, near Tarroona. A young fellow was coming down the hill with a gun, looking for rabbits, when the weapon went off, the bullet finding a lodging in the driver's arm. He was taken to Hobart and had to have the arm amputated. This misfortune did not prevent the pioneer driver from continuing work. He used to drive a four-in-hand with one arm, having a belt round his waist with a hook attached to assist him in managing his team⁶.

The guard on the coach was

one Mark Solomon who blew a strident note on the bugle at stopping places and frequently enlivened the journey by playing airs on his instrument as the coach wound round the hills on its way to and from Hobart Town⁷.

The proprietor of the "Retreat Inn" was also a man of business but, like many other

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small business men in the 1860s, he went bankrupt. Between the 1st February and the 14th May 1860 notices appeared in the *Mercury*, advising that

Brent and Westbrook are favoured with instructions from John Milward Esq., assignee of the estate of Mr. Joseph Fisher to sell by auction on the premises at Brown's River... (many items) 6 useful Coach or Gig Horses, First-rate omnibus, ditto phaeton, ditto break, ditto stage coach, harness, etc⁸.

Later advertisements included household effects, orchards of apples, pears, apricots, plums, etc. and finally, on the 14th May calling attention to the sale

this day of the valuable property of Mr Joseph Fisher... (Which has been) Divided into several lots for the convenience of small capitalists, affording them an opportunity of becoming landed proprietors. For the accommodation of intending purchasers from Town a Break will be in attendance at the Auctioneers Mart at Nine o'clock precisely⁹.

What happened to Joseph Fisher's business has not been discovered, but on the 28th March 1860 he was up before the Insolvency Court, proof of debt being £241 9s 9d owed to Mr Thomas Pascoe, of the "Artillery Brewery," Hobart Town¹⁰.

From the 17th May 1860 a lively correspondence appears in the *Mercury*, between Pascoe and Fisher. A "take-over" of the coach service appears to have been in the air. On the 22nd May Fisher wrote:

"and now as to his friendly endeavour to place me in my former position. If, when my property was ordered to be sold, his attendance at the sale and purchase of my Conveyance running between Kingston and Hobarton, thus depriving me of that branch of my occupation and living by befriending me, Mr Pascoe certainly deserves the credit of having done so, but there may possibly be two opinions upon this matter"¹¹.

A couple of days later, Pascoe replied:

"P.S. The Conveyance which I purchased at Mr. Fisher's sale is not the one alluded to in his letter. I even offered it with other effects to him for the same price they cost me at his sale. This it is evident I purchased not with a view to his injury; on the contrary, I even materially assisted him with two of my horses, stabling them at my own expense at the Kingston Hotel,

for the purpose of enabling him to continue his ordinary Conveyance. So much then for his assertions"¹².

However, in spite of the argument it appears that Fisher continued to run his coach from the "Retreat Inn" at Brown's River. In August he was again in court charged with owing £22 17s to Mr Alfred Nicholas, for spirits — the defendant pleaded insolvency. The "Retreat Inn" continued with Joseph Fisher as licensee and was the venue for a meeting to organise the Kingston Ploughing Match, to be held on the 3rd October 1860. A special coach was put on for the occasion, run by N. and T. Lucas:

October 1 1860 — THE UNDERSIGNED will start their NEW FOUR HORSE COACH to the Kingston Ploughing Match, on WEDNESDAY the 3rd day of October, at 8 o'clock from the Brunswick Wine Vaults, Liverpool Street.

N & T Lucas¹³.

No doubt the journey was uneventful and a great day was had by all.

In 1861 Fisher was again in trouble with the law, charged with smuggling "one case of Geneva and 37 pounds of tobacco landed from the ship 'Pryde'"¹⁴. During the case, mention was made of Fisher's two sons, who, it seems, took over the coach service the next year as the following notice appeared in the *Mercury* in January 1862.

On and after this date, the Brown's River Conveyance will start from the "Club Tap", Murray Street, leaving at the usual hours, R. Fisher¹⁵.

A few months later the service was moved to Mr Pear's "Duke of Clarence" on the corner of Murray and Liverpool Streets. In the 1850s and 1860s Captain Butler Stoney visited the State and recorded¹⁶:

The road to Brown's River is a very fine road skirting along the bay, sometimes touching the Beach and again crossing over some jutting headland, which forms the favourite drive and ride for the idle and gay of the city.

In August 1862 Thomas Pascoe defaulted on his mortgage repayments on the "Kingston Hotel", which was sold in October 1862 to Mr W. Elwin. The Notice of sale on the 8th October says¹⁷:

For the information of strangers and visitors to the Colony it may be stated that Kingston is about 10 miles from Hobart Town; that a noble road services the whole distance; that the

scenery is splendid; the beach immediately contiguous and the marine and river views are charming beyond description; and that, as a healthful locality, Kingston, Brown's River, cannot probably be excelled in Tasmania.

Five years later George Lucas and Joseph Fisher became licencees of the "Kingston Hotel" and the following year Mr Watson took over the "Retreat Inn" and the coach service moved to the "Kingston Hotel" in 1869. Hotel licencees changed frequently at this time. Joe Fisher moved to the "Longley Hotel" and both the "Retreat Inn" and the "Kingston Hotel" were run by the Lucas brothers.

The old stables of the "Kingston Hotel" were built from handmade bricks and had a cobblestone floor, with hay lofts above and remained the headquarters for the Kingston end of the service for many years. They were demolished in 1969 to make way for the Southern Outlet.

The first mention of another service on the Brown's River run is in 1878 when, in addition to Fisher's conveyance leaving the "Tatts Hotel," "A Coach" also left Graham's "Eardley Arms" Hotel¹⁸. Mr Walter Graham was the "late manager of Page's Coaches"¹⁹ and it seems possible that Fisher reached an agreement with him as the following year, Fisher's Coach left the "Eardley Arms" and another one, Dove's left "Tatts"²⁰.

Over the next twelve years Dove's and Bower's as well as Fisher, ran coaches. In 1888 Mr C.J. Fisher was running a service, still from the "Eardley Arms".

Coach travel in the nineteenth century was not without its dangers and accidents, similar to the one reported in the *Mercury* on 15th March 1890, were frequent.

An accident, fortunately unattended by serious results, a broken pole and other injuries to the vehicle excepted — befell Mr. Fisher's Brown's River Coach on Thursday afternoon. Crossing Kingston Bridge the horses were startled by some heaps of sand piled on the roadside, and the coach being thrown with great force against the siding, nearly capsized. The driver (Fisher) was hurled from his seat, throwing a complete somersault, landed in the adjoining paddock without injury. Lying on the ground he with commendable presence of mind, still held on to his reins, while the only passenger occupying a box seat, Mr. Elsasser, representative of the Warner's Safe Cure Co., pluckily stuck there,

and placing his foot on the brake, prevented further mischief. Inside the coach were two old people and a young woman who escaped with a shock.

A year later the following notices appeared in the *Mercury*²¹.

I beg to notify the public that I have disposed of the above Coaches to Messrs. FISHER and RULE and in returning thanks for past favours beg to solicit a continuance of the patronage hitherto accorded to me for my successors.

W.J. FISHER

In reference to the above we beg to inform our friends and the travelling public that we have taken over the above coaching plant, and trust by civility and attention to merit a renewal of the favours so liberally bestowed on our predecessor.

Edward Fisher

Harry Rule.

Harry Rule bought out Edward Fisher in 1898, thus ending the association of the name Fisher with the Brown's River Coach Service after a period of fifty three years. In the early 1890s Harry Rule took over the "Kingston Hotel" and ran the coaches for about twenty years.

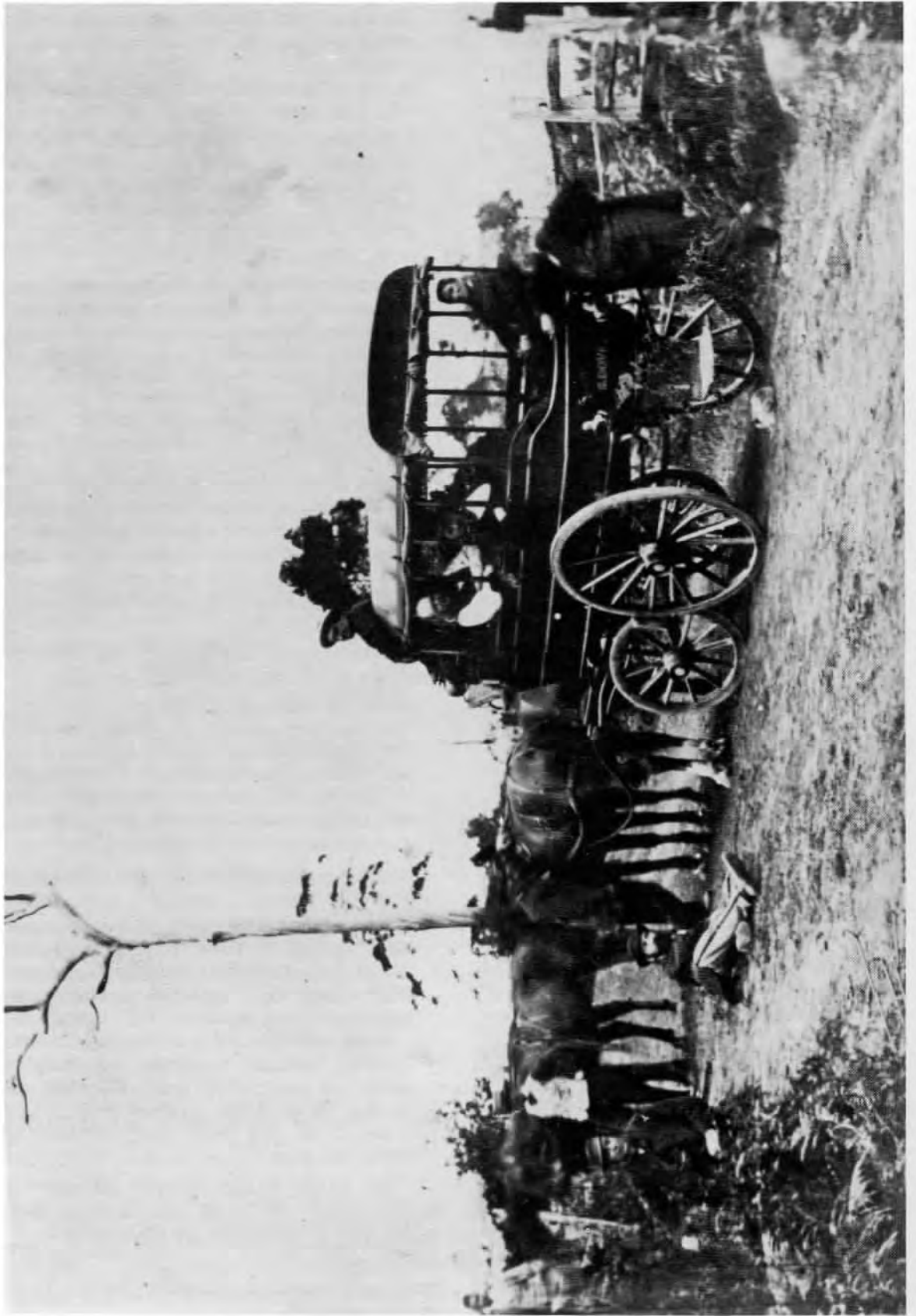
At the turn of the century the drive to Brown's River was described²² as being:

one of the finest that can be found anywhere. Made by the prisoners in the old days, the road is excellent from start to finish, and kept in the best of order, and the scenery is superb, the traveller for the first time being filled with admiration at every turn at the varied and ever changing views to be obtained.

In 1901 the *Cyclopedia of Tasmania* contained²³:

When he [H.J. Rule] first started on the road some fourteen years ago two small traps were all that were required [it is probable that another coach was also operating]. Now the traffic is so great that four large coaches are needed for ordinary occasions, and in holiday times several extra vehicles have to be put on. . . hundreds of people go there every week, especially on Sunday. The drive down in coach from Hobart is one of the most picturesque that could be found anywhere.

In 1908 Kingborough became a Municipality and Harry Rule was the first Warden of the Council. At the first Council Meeting on the 6th January 1908 "There was much conjecture of the future of the new-born municipality"²⁴.



Mr S. Dove's coach on the Brown's River Road, 1870s.

They spoke of the likelihood of the electric tramway extending from Hobart to Kingston and a railway through the municipality to the Huon. They wondered what effect the new-fangled horseless carriage and flying machine would have.

However, the rate of progress did not seem to keep pace with other areas. In 1913 Harry Rule was still running the service and the first motor coach was introduced²⁵.

The coaches are of 40 horse-power, with a carrying capacity of 26 passengers, and were built by Messrs. Vout, Chisholm and Co. The use of motor-cars is expected to shorten the journey by half an hour and the timetable has been arranged so as to enable business people to make Brown's River a suburban residence. City men will be able to reach town in good time for business and return about 6 o'clock in the evening. Mr. Rule believes that in the near future it will be necessary to run at least two more trips a day.

Harry Rule sold out to Webster, Rometch and Duncan Ltd. and in 1914 there were two coaches daily leaving Hobart.

Webster, Rometch Ltd. also ran a thriving tourist business. They continued to run the "Round Trip" which had been inaugurated by

Harry Rule. Visitors were able to go by horse brake from Hobart via Fern Tree and Longley to Kingston Beach for lunch, spend the afternoon on the beach and return via Brown's River Road to Hobart, for 5 shillings. So for a few years the old horse drawn vehicles and the modern motor coaches ran side by side.

By the 1930s Webster Rometch Astor Motors' two coaches and their drivers, Mr Ted Burt and Mr Haywood, were familiar figures on the Brown's River Road. The yellow and later blue buses would stop when hailed, the driver climb down, put the luggage on top of the coach and off they would go again.

In 1949 a "cinema special" bus was introduced which left Blackmans Bay at 7 pm. and returned from Hobart at 11.10 pm. Webster Rometch Astor Motors sold out to Pioneer in 1953, ending a thirty nine year association with the Kingston to Hobart bus service. Pioneer ran the service for 16 years before selling out to Charlie Ayers.

In November 1937 the Tramways Committee of the Hobart City Council gave approval for a trial bus service to run to Tarooma.

This was inaugurated on the 16th December 1937. As was to be expected, there were problems from the beginning. In April 1938



From Webster, Rometch Ltd, Tasmania, Tourists Information and Accommodation Guide 1915-16, page 13.

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it was reported that "usage of the Bus Service was not up to expectations"²⁶. Some buses were overcrowded, and some nearly empty. The need for night buses was obvious as a "Theatre Trip" was timetabled for Saturday nights and extra buses ran on Friday afternoon and evening. The service ran at an average loss of £4 a week.

A public meeting was held in Tarooma in January 1938 at which alterations were recommended to the timetable. It was explained to the meeting that the service was primarily to be a feeder service to the tram terminus in Sandy Bay and that care must be taken to avoid doubling up with the Webster Rometch Astor Motors timetable along the Channel Highway.

Early 1938 saw an epidemic of infantile paralysis in Hobart and this appears to have affected the usage of all public transport. The "Penny Section" of the bus service from Tarooma to Sandy Bay continued to make a loss of nearly £3 a week, but the service continued to run smoothly until 1953.

In August 1953 the Tramways Committee decided to hand the running of the service over to a private operator. No tenders were called for the running of the service and, in fact, it appears that Mr Gray "applied to take over the running of the service"²⁷ which was losing £5,000 a year. The Council recommended that two buses should be released to Mr Gray and sold at a "satisfactory price". The Bedford buses were valued by Nettlefolds at £1,250 each and eventually sold for £1,100 each to Mr Gray. The transfer of the service was gazetted, with opportunities for appeal, and in October the service was officially taken over. The Council retained nominal control over the service through a subsidy of 10 shillings per month.

Extension of the bus service beyond Tarooma Crescent took many years. In 1959 the Metropolitan Transport Trust turned down a request from the Kingborough Council to extend the service to the Shot Tower. It was not until 1982 that the Terminus was moved from Tarooma Crescent to the Monomeath Estate. Although this benefited the residents of Tarooma, it caused a further reduction in the business for Ayers Bus Service over Bonnet Hill to Kingston.

The advent of the Southern Outlet made the journey between Hobart and Kingston very

much shorter and easier, and this resulted in a drop in business for the Bonnet Hill service. Today a coach leaves Kingston in the morning for Hobart and two coaches return via Tarooma in the afternoon.

The Brown's River Coach service has now passed from the days of "One-arm Fisher", driving his coach and four, with Mark Solomon blowing tunes on his bugle, to the advent of the M.T.T. with its regulations and restrictions. I wonder what Joe Fisher would have thought!

References

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