



Devon Family History Society
Joint Project Publication with
Devon Record Office



DEVON RECORD OFFICE

EXETER REGISTER OF LICENSED HACKNEY CARRIAGES

1880-1889

DRO Reference – ECA

DFHS Book Reference - D031

The licensing of hackney carriages was enforced by the Town Police Clauses Act 1847 and this law is still used to regulate the licensing of taxis. Exeter City Council passed its own bye-laws to supplement the Act. At the time this register was kept, the bye-laws of 1879 were in force with some amendments made in 1881.

A hackney carriage was any wheeled vehicle drawn by horses, mules, asses or goats and put out for hire. The Inspector of Hackney Carriages, who had an office at the Guildhall, was responsible for checking on the maintenance of carriages and harnesses and for reporting any misdemeanours committed by the drivers to the General Purposes Committee of the City Council. Drivers had to obtain a licence every year. They were expected to wear a badge showing their licence number, but this requirement was repealed in 1881. The bye-laws ordered that they be civil to their passengers and not smoke any substance without the passenger's permission. They were not to ply for hire before 7am or after 11pm, although if they worked outside these times they were entitled to ask for the fare and a half. Any lost property found in the carriage by the driver had to be taken to the Police Station at the Guildhall.

Hackney carriages had to be licensed annually and the licences entered up in a register. Plates displaying the licence number were to be fixed two on the outside of the carriage and one inside. The carriage had to be fitted with two lamps which had to be kept trimmed, and lit between sun-rise and sun-set or during foggy weather. The seats had to be cushioned and a mat put on the floor, or clean straw in wet weather. If the carriage was a closed one, there had to be a check string in the carriage so that the passenger could communicate with the driver, who held the other end of the string in his hand. Carriages were not permitted to travel at more than five miles per hour and a four wheeled carriage drawn by a horse or pony had to have some kind of brake.

A table of fares was decided on by the City Council and this was displayed outside the Guildhall, outside the city railway stations, on every cab stand and inside every carriage. A driver could not be required to travel more than five miles outside the city boundaries unless by agreement.

Hackney carriage drivers had to ply for trade at a recognised cab stand. There were 23 in Exeter in 1879, with places for 65 carriages. Each stand had a certain number of places, between one and six, and drivers would wait with their carriages for their turn

to be hired. Horses could be fed while they were waiting if the driver gave them hay in his hand or provided a nose-bag.

The hackney carriages listed in this register were licensed by Exeter City Council between 1880 and 1889. Some of the carriages were driven by their owner while others were part of a 'fleet' of carriages owned by one person who employed several drivers to work for him. There are columns in the registers for entering offences for which the proprietor and driver had been convicted, but these have not been filled in.