

**Travelling through the city: using life writing to explore individual experiences of urban travel c1840-1940**

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**Abstract**

This article uses a range of life writing to examine the ways in which urban travellers engaged with new transport technologies and experiences in Britain in the century after 1840. It is argued that people easily engaged with new forms and sites of mobility, mixed transport modes and incorporated them into their everyday travel. They enjoyed the greater speeds of travel that became available and expected transport networks to work. It is argued that many of the characteristics of ‘new mobilities’ usually associated with the late twentieth century were present over a century earlier, though some more traditional forms of mobility persisted.

**Key words**

Transport, Mobilities, Nineteenth-century, Life writing, walking, cycling, speed.

## **Travelling through the city: using life writing to explore individual experiences of urban travel c1840-1940**

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### **The landscape of urban travel c1840-1940**

The ways in which people travelled probably changed more rapidly in the century after 1840 than in any other period. Although canal passenger transport (always relatively small) declined, railways expanded rapidly; buses and trams both increased in number and adopted new technologies (the electric tram, the motor bus); the private motor car, though still the preserve of a minority, began to dominate road space; and bicycles changed from leisure transport for the rich to everyday transport for many working men. At the same time travel on foot continued to be one of the most frequent means of transport for travel over relatively short distances. Associated with these changes was a significant restructuring of urban infrastructure to accommodate new travel technologies: roads were widened and, by the mid-twentieth century, were increasingly arranged to accommodate motor vehicles; tram lines became an important part of urban road space in many cities; and new stations, tunnels and extensive sidings accommodated railway expansion (Dyos and Aldcroft 1969; Kellett 1969; Hadfield 1981; Freeman and Aldcroft 1988; O'Connell 1998; Oddy 2007). Cumulatively the development of new transport technologies, often directly or indirectly associated with the modernisation of urban space, began to push older and less technologically sophisticated forms of transport such as cycling and walking towards the margins of road space. Both continued to be important but were rarely specifically planned or provided for in the restructuring of British cities. Although this process gathered pace and became dominant after 1940, its origins can be traced back to a much earlier period (Pooley 2010; Gunn 2013).

The use of these differing and rapidly changing forms of urban transport by urban residents was both commonplace and necessary. The ability to travel quickly and easily around the city was (and remains) an essential part of urban life. Exclusion or alienation from available forms of transport can lead to significant disadvantage (Lucas 2004; Hine 2012). This paper focuses not on the transport technologies themselves, but on the multiple ways in which urban travellers engaged with these forms of transport. How did travellers react to new forms of transport and how easily did they adapt to their use? How did the modernisation of transport systems, producing faster and more varied transport technologies, affect the experience of urban travel? How convenient were the evolving urban transport systems for the sorts of journeys that were most commonly made? How did more traditional forms of transport, especially walking, fare as urban planners increasingly embraced modernity in the provision of transport systems? This paper begins to address these questions using a range of contemporary life writing to probe aspects of the experience of travelling through the city in the century after 1840. Examples are necessarily selective, but together they begin to provide a picture of how urban residents negotiated the changing transport infrastructure of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries.

Twenty-first century mobility has become the focus of extensive study by researchers drawing on theoretical frameworks developed within the context of the so-called 'new mobilities paradigm' (Sheller and Urry 2006; Hannam, Sheller and Urry 2006; Urry 2007; Cresswell 2010; Shaw and Hesse 2010). These approaches can also be employed to examine past mobilities. Given the wide range of studies that have embraced these new mobilities concepts, it is inevitable that the ideas have been interpreted and used in a variety of ways. This only adds to the richness of research in this field of enquiry. However, I suggest that there are a number of key features that lie at the core of most contemporary mobility studies. First and foremost is the assumption that mobility is not just about the movement of people,

goods or ideas from one place to another, but that it is a process so deeply embedded in society that it has become a fundamental part of society itself. At scales ranging from the local to the global, mobility is simply what makes things work. As Urry states, the mobility turn is

... a turn that emphasizes how all social entities, from a single household to large scale corporations, presuppose many different forms of actual or potential movement. The mobility turn connects the analysis of different forms of travel, transport and communications with the multiple ways in which economic and social life is performed and organized through time and across various spaces' (Urry 2007, 6).

Second, and related to the above point, it is assumed that movement has significant meanings over and above the physical transfer of someone or something from one location to another. This implies not only that movement has impact and significance in terms of its consequences, but also that the act and experience of moving itself is of importance. Third, the new mobility paradigm has focused attention on the role and impact of new forms of movement, especially those facilitated by new mobile technologies such as social media, smartphones and other computer-based forms of communication. It is argued that these technologies not only allow new forms of rapid and virtual interaction (without physical movement), but also are themselves part of a mobility revolution as they allow almost instant communication on the move. Fourth, implicit in much work using new mobilities concepts is the assumption that in the twenty-first century we are experiencing new levels of mobility: people, goods and ideas now flow around the globe both more rapidly and more completely than ever before. Furthermore, this has led also to heightened expectations of mobility: if we cannot move or communicate quickly and easily due to unforeseen disruption then this can generate high levels of frustration. Finally, research has focused on the development of new sites of mobility: those places (such as airport departure lounges) that depend for their

existence on both the expectation and ability of many people to travel quickly and easily. It is argued that through such sites mobility has transformed both the structure and function of some city spaces, creating nodes that connect networks of flows of people, goods and ideas that sustain modern styles of living (Kaufmann, Bergman and Joye 2004; Cresswell 2006; Larsen, Urry and Axhausen 2006; Banister 2008; Adey 2010; Cresswell and Merriman 2011; Grieco and Urry 2012; Merriman 2012; Sheller and Urry 2016). There has been some recent consideration of the historical relevance of such mobilities approaches in the context of transport and travel, especially in journals such as *Transfers* and in the *T2M yearbook* (see for example Mom, Divall and Lyth 2009; Divall, 2011; Merriman et al., 2013). Some of these themes are used to frame the discussion developed in this paper and to further elaborate the relevance of new mobilities concepts to past mobilities.

### **Life writing and mobility**

Contemporary research on mobility mostly uses a range of qualitative and ethnographic techniques, including accompanied journeys, to explore the experiences of everyday travel (Ricketts Hein, Evans and Jones 2008; Fincham, McGuinness and Murray 2009; Carpiano 2009). However, this is clearly not possible for historical research. For the more recent past oral history techniques may be used, but otherwise we must rely on any written evidence that survives. Life writing – which encompasses autobiographies, life histories, memoirs, letters, diaries and other material of a personal nature<sup>1</sup> - forms one important source, with diaries that have frequent (preferably daily) entries providing the closest equivalent to a historical ethnography. However, there are many problems inherent in using personal diaries as

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<sup>1</sup>. A useful definition of what life writing encompasses can be found at <https://www.wolfson.ox.ac.uk/what-life-writing>.

evidence, some generic to most life writing and some that apply more specifically to the study of mobility (Ponsonby 1923; Fothergill 1974; Vickery 1998; Lejeune 2009). First, diary writers are not representative of the entire population. They come from those with the time, literacy and inclination to keep a diary and, moreover, we can only read those that survive. Thus, by definition, diaries come disproportionately from the more privileged portion of the population. Second, diaries can only reveal those things that the diarist chooses to relate. There is no way of gauging what is left out or how material included is selected. On occasion a diary may contain passages that were later crossed through but which remain at least partially legible. This can raise ethical problems about whether the researcher should attempt to use material that the diarist clearly attempted to remove. There is some evidence that men and women engaged in different forms of life writing, with men more likely to write autobiographies and women more likely to keep diaries. Autobiographies and life histories are likely to be rather less reliable as indicators of everyday activities as they will have been written later in life as memory fades, and often have a strong message of self-justification for the life led (Humphries 2010, 12-48; Griffin 2013). For this reason only personal diaries are used in this article.

The nature of diary writing also creates additional problems when studying mobility. Because everyday travel is a taken-for-granted and mundane activity it is unlikely that all such movements were recorded in a diary. There is a tendency for diaries to focus on those aspects of daily life that were different from the norm, rather than relating every detail of a daily routine. Thus there is a real risk that the picture we get of mobility from any life writing is one that focuses disproportionately on the unusual or problematic, rather than on the routine and everyday. For instance a routine journey to work may only be explicitly recorded if there are unusual delays. It can also be argued that most diaries tell us little about the real experience of travel other than what was done. Only rarely did the diarists studied here record

feelings and emotions, and when they did this was mostly in the context of unusual, unexpected or unwanted events. This contrasts with some more literary diaries where emotions can figure rather more prominently (Wordsworth and Woof 2002), and in fiction where the experience of travel can often form an important part of the narrative (Pearce 2012; 2016). As with most historical research, there is little that we can do about these source constraints other than being fully aware of them during analysis and interpretation of the data. In this article ‘experience’ of travel mostly relates to the more material evidence usually present in the diaries, with much rarer direct information on feelings and emotions.

The paper arises from a long-term project that is using a range of different types of life writing to examine both residential migration and everyday mobility in the past. In total some 40 items of life writing have so far been examined (mainly diaries but also including life histories and letters), but for this article I draw on six diaries written during the century after 1840 to examine some of the ways in which urban travellers engaged with the spaces through which they passed. These diaries have been selected because they cover a range of times and locations, and because they all contain reasonably rich material on urban mobility. Basic characteristics of the diarists are given in Table 1, and more information is given in the subsequent discussion. It is not suggested that such sources are necessarily representative of a larger population, and this is not the purpose of utilising such qualitative evidence. Rather, they provide insights into the process of mobility and the experiences of individual travellers that cannot be revealed by quantitative sources, and as such seek to replicate the ethnographic and similar evidence frequently used in contemporary mobilities studies.

## **Encounters with the new**

During the century after 1840 urban residents would have observed their surroundings being transformed by a range of new transport technologies. Some may have barely registered and had little impact on their daily lives, but others may have fundamentally altered the spaces through which they passed and the ways in which they travelled. Diary entries can provide clues to the nature and extent of such processes. Railways had the greatest impact on urban space and travel from the mid-nineteenth century, and the diarists studied were certainly aware of the changes that were taking place around them. John Leeson frequently used the railway to travel in and around London in the mid-nineteenth century and to visit friends and relatives further afield. He approved of its speed and convenience, and commented favourably on the opening of new stations and lines that he felt would ease his travel around the city. He also commented positively on new forms of communication that facilitated virtual mobilities, and on the freeing up of road transport in London through the removal of tolls.

I saw the new railway station facing the Crescent – large and convenient – to connect the railways on the north and south of the Thames. To be opened 1<sup>st</sup> June. (Leeson diary, May 17<sup>th</sup> 1862).

A telegraph cable laid down from Ireland to New York, which worked at first, and messages sent between Queen Victoria and the President of the United States. (Leeson diary, October 8<sup>th</sup>, 1858).

All the Turnpikes in Kensington, Chelsea, Hammersmith, Notting Hill, Marylebone, Regent's Park, Camden and Kentish Town, Islington – abolished and removed – the roads are now free of toll. (Leeson diary, July 2<sup>nd</sup> 1864).

For the middle-aged, middle class John Leeson, new transport technologies and modes of operation were to be welcomed because they eased his travel around the city in which he lived and worked. Even those who were much older also seemed to embrace new transport technologies. In 1847 John Leeson recorded the reaction of his 76 year old mother to travelling by rail; probably the first time she had done so and clearly a positive experience:

Mother went to Norwich by Railway at 7 to see Richard. She arrived safe, likes Railway travelling. Richard busy, she likes his house. (Leeson diary, July 10<sup>th</sup> 1847).

Other British urban areas were also innovating, and the diarists that encountered such changes reacted positively. Birkenhead on Merseyside was the first town in Europe to have a street tramway, developed in 1860 by George Francis Train (Culture 24 website; O'Flaherty 1972). This was encountered in October of that year by the young John Lee, visiting relatives on Merseyside:

Train to Liverpool, dinner with Aunt and Uncle Walter. Over to Tranmere walked from there to Birkenhead and got into one of the Americain [sic] Railway carriages [sic], that have just been made here to run through the streets on rails. We rode daily along to the Park, enjoyed a short walk there ... (John Lee diary, October 14<sup>th</sup> 1860).

Some years later his daughter, Elizabeth, also encountered new transport technology on Merseyside, which she subsequently used on many occasions. The Mersey rail tunnel linking Birkenhead and Liverpool opened in 1886 and rapidly became the most convenient means of travelling to Liverpool from the other side of the Mersey (Patmore 1961). Elizabeth Lee, who lived with her parents in Prenton just outside Birkenhead, went on the railway as soon as it opened and was impressed especially by the lifts and the crowds of people:

Fine day. The railway under the Tunnel was opened for traffic today and I went to L'pool by it. I went up in the "lift" when I got to L'pool and there was such a frightful crush to get it. Had a good look round L'pool and came back by train. Such a lot of gentleman in the station. It was so jolly but I got nearly squashed to death. (Elizabeth Lee diary, February 1<sup>st</sup> 1886).

If trains and trams were the new transport technologies of the nineteenth century, motor vehicles were seen as the epitome of modernisation and innovation in the early twentieth century (O'Connell 1998; Merriman 2007). Although the number of vehicles on Britain's roads remained low in the first two decades of the twentieth century, with motor cycles and scooters outnumbering private cars in 1920, by 1930 there were over one million licensed private cars in Britain, together with almost half a million motor buses and goods vehicles (Table 2).

None of the diarists referred to in this paper owned a car themselves at the time the diaries were written, but several had family or friends with access to a motor vehicle. It is clear from the diary entries that in the early decades of the twentieth century 'motoring' was viewed as something unusual, mostly associated with leisure travel, often with exotic or romantic associations. Ida Berry lived with her widowed mother in south Manchester and had no access to a car herself. All her travel was by a variety of forms of public transport, by bike or on foot. However, she did have some young male acquaintances who had access to a car (most probably a family vehicle rather than their own), and these were usually encountered while she was out walking or cycling with friends. There is no evidence in the diary that Ida ever rode in a car herself, but there are hints of romance and the excitement of engagement with the new in the brief mentions of motoring that do occur:

We went for our 8 mile [cycle] ride for the first time this year. It was a glorious evening and we did enjoy it. The setting sun lighted all the newly opened leaves down Gibb Lane and the birds were singing and the air was lovely. We rested for a while down Stockport Rd. I viewed the familiar landscape and watched the rose-tinted clouds fly past. As we came home we met Harry, motoring, so he turned back and rode between us down Northen Grove, and we had a little chat at the gate. (Berry diary, March 27<sup>th</sup> 1905).

Motor buses began operating in Manchester in 1906 in Northenden, close to where Ida and her family lived (Greater Manchester Museum of Transport website). Ida recorded what was probably the first time she travelled on this new form of transport, but made no specific comment about how it compared to the omnibuses and trams that she more usually used. As the twentieth century progressed motor buses gradually replaced trams as the main form of public transport in many of Britain's cities (Pooley and Turnbull, 2000a).

Maud wheeled her bicycle to Shaws to have a puncture mended etc. At night we went on the motor bus from Northenden. (Berry diary, June 16<sup>th</sup> 1906).

Gerald Gray Fitzmaurice came from a much wealthier family than Ida Berry. He was educated at Cambridge and at the time of the diary was working as a young lawyer in London. As a young man he did not own a car, and most everyday travel was by public transport or on foot. However, by the 1920s when he kept a diary, cars were becoming more common, and he did have several friends and acquaintances with cars. As with Ida Berry, motoring was something associated with leisure, pleasure and romance. This is expressed particularly clearly on the occasion of Gerald's 25<sup>th</sup> birthday, and hints at emerging attitudes towards female drivers in the early-twentieth century (Clarke 2007; Berger 1986).

I am 25 today. Staying weekend with the Van Lessens to celebrate Gladys's and my joint birthdays. Yesterday we went for such a lovely drive in Prue's new car, a 5 seater Fiat Saloon, a sweet little thing. ... Prue drove so well – dear little Prue. ... Same evening went with Prue to Shalford Park and danced. It was the first time she had driven at night but she got on very well. ... This evening it poured. Prue and I had an adventurous time getting her car into shelter from the rain, and now she has just taught me the new dance, the Charleston. Altogether a perfectly delightful weekend.

(Fitzmaurice diary, October 24<sup>th</sup> 1926).

Of course, cars in the 1920s were often unreliable and, when they would not function, alternative means of transport had to be resorted to. The vagaries of motoring, and the unreliable nature of this new form of transport, were recorded by Gerald in his diary:

Towards the end of the dinner we were greeted with the news that the car wouldn't function, or rather its lights wouldn't. After attempts to hire a car and/or get a taxi to take us down, it ended by our going on John Arthur's motorbike ... (Fitzmaurice diary, January 8<sup>th</sup>, 1926).

Evidence from these diaries suggests that encounters with new forms of transport were relatively commonplace and mostly unproblematic. The diarists' everyday journeys were accomplished utilising whatever means were most convenient at the time and they could move between old and new technologies with relative ease. Inevitably, there were occasions when new technologies such as the motor car did not function as they should, but as motors were used mainly for leisure and pleasure rather than essential everyday travel, any inconvenience caused seemed relatively slight (see for instance Levitt 1909). Undoubtedly there were other experiences of new transport technologies, but for the diarists studied here the modernisation of transport infrastructure and technology was something that they

accepted and welcomed and new forms of urban mobility were readily embraced. Mobility was as central to these travellers as to most respondents in present-day mobilities research.

### **Experiences of speed**

One of the main characteristics of the ‘modernisation’ of late-twentieth century society was the suggestion that everything has speeded up. Not only can we travel faster and further, but also there is an expectation that life itself is lived at a more rapid pace, with more activities crammed into a given period of time (Harvey 1989, 284-307; Thrift 1994, 1995; Kern 2003).

How did urban travellers in an earlier period respond to increases in speed that were facilitated by new transport technologies, and is there any evidence that as transport became faster so too the pace of urban life increased? Some clues to the answers to these questions can be found in the diaries studied.

John Leeson managed a portfolio of high-quality property in London and spent much of his time travelling to collect rent from tenants. Most such journeys appeared to be undertaken on foot, by Hansom Cab, bus or train (frequently the mode was not specified), but on occasion he would hire a light ‘Fly’ carriage. This was most frequently done for special social occasions, and although he rarely commented specifically on speed there was one occasion on which the horse ran out of control and he was clearly shaken by the experience:

I ... come home from London in a Fly – the horse ran away with me alone in it from our house, he providentially stopped at his old stables near Addison Road – I have much cause to be thankful to God for preserving me as I might have been thrown out and killed or much hurt – for which protection I bless his Holy Name. (Leeson diary, April 26<sup>th</sup> 1861).

Although John Leeson's experience of speed with a runaway horse and carriage was scary, at other times sensations of speed could be exhilarating and exciting. This was clearly the case for Ida Berry when she cycled around south Manchester in the early twentieth century. Cycling, usually with her sister and friends, was Ida's main form of recreation and on occasion she covered substantial distances (50 miles (c80 km) in a day in one instance). When cycling Ida seemed very aware of her surroundings, commenting on scenery and environmental conditions, but experiences of speed added extra exhilaration to her rides. She revelled in the kinaesthetic engagement with speed and environment that bike travel enabled (Spinney 2006; Larsen 2014):

In the evening Maud and I went for a ride through Gatley and Cheadle, and had a lovely coast down Schools Hill. We saw Chris at Didsbury. (Berry diary, July 28<sup>th</sup> 1903).

Maud and I cycled to Alderley Edge after tea, it was a glorious ride we scorched home. (Berry diary, August 8<sup>th</sup> 1906).

Rhona Little arrived in London (from Londonderry, Northern Ireland) in January 1938. This was her first journey outside Northern Ireland and she immediately encountered transport technologies and opportunities that were new to her (though not to Londoners). She used her first few months in London to explore the city and used a wide variety of transport modes including travelling by bus, train, tube and walking (Pooley 2004). She rarely experienced any difficulty travelling in a new environment and never suggested that increased pace of life or speed of transport in London compared to the small town of Londonderry was something of note. Occasionally she was caught out by the transport system, as in the following example just one month after she arrived in London, but for the most part her transition from small town to large metropolis was relatively unproblematic:

When at Charing Cross I took a train which flew past Earl's Court, and away to Hammersmith. Was I astonished! I got a Piccadilly train back, however I was home later than I expected (Little diary, 7<sup>th</sup> February, 1938).

Throughout all the diaries studied, speed, either of transport or of urban life, was rarely mentioned. When references to speed did occur they were most often linked to emotions either of pleasure or fear. More often, diarists commented when lack of speed was the problem. Almost all diarists at some point commented on slow transport, lack of connections, delays to trains or buses, congestion and overcrowding. For instance, in 1860 John Lee travelled on an excursion from East Lancashire to Liverpool. He had an enjoyable day but encountered delay and inconvenience on the journey there and back:

Went on a cheap trip to a Grand Review at Knowsley Park near Liverpool. We had a slight accident at the Accrington Station, where several got black eyes, bloody noses &c &c. We had to go to Kirkby Station, and then walk four miles to Knowsley. .. I set off at the conclusion of the review to come to the station. ... When we got to the station, it was completely crammed. It is in a cutting and all up the side were groups squatting and waiting patiently. I had to wait about 3 hours in the open air, when very fortunately I got into a first class carriage. Set off about 10 o'clock and it was 2 the next morning before I arrived at Burnley. (John Lee diary, September 1<sup>st</sup> 1860).

Gerald Fitzmaurice also complained of poor transport both when travelling outside London, and also of the inconvenience and discomfort of London trains. For instance, after a short period in the West Country he complained:

I hate being back in murky stuffy London. We had an unpleasant uncomfortable journey, hot and train crowded. I had to stand most of the way (Fitzmaurice diary, August 19<sup>th</sup> 1926).

One implication to be drawn from the diary entries is that throughout the century after 1840 urban residents expected transport to work and to travel reasonably quickly. There is little sense that the speeding up of life or of urban transport was a problem. This was something that they mostly embraced and readily incorporated into daily routines. As today, the much greater difficulties were caused when transport systems failed to work as anticipated. These themes replicate those found in many contemporary mobility studies.

### **Ease of use**

As the range of transport options increased from the mid-nineteenth century then issues of how the different modes interconnected became crucial. A convenient multi-mode journey required the ability to change between, for instance, bus, tram or train without undue delay or difficulty. The fact that most of these services were run by different operators meant that such integration was not necessarily a priority, and interconnections could be further threatened by delays and disruptions to the transport network (Dyos and Aldcroft 1969; Schivelbusch 1986; Freeman and Aldcroft 1988). Although all transport systems are subject to some disruption, often due to weather or other circumstances beyond the control of the operators, for the most parts travellers in the past easily negotiated any travel difficulties that did arise (Pooley 2013). This was especially the case for Ida Berry in south Manchester in the first decade of the twentieth century. While much of her everyday travel was undertaken on foot and by bike, she also had access to a wide range of public transport (bus, tram, train, cab), all of which she used frequently and at times changed between without difficulty. There is no indication in the diary that such journeys required detailed planning with regard to timetables, rather there was an expectation that transport would be available and that the different modes would interconnect as in the examples below, first for a Good Friday outing to the rural

fringes of south Manchester and, second, for a trip that combined pleasure and house hunting within the urban area:

We went to Chapel and then for a walk with Ruby and Norman and they brought us home. After dinner they called for us and we went on the bus to Cheadle and then on a tram to Stockport and then another to 'Woodley', and on the way we passed 'Vernon Park'. We climbed 700 feet and got to the top of 'Werneth Low'. It was lovely all the country round and we could see 'Kinder Scout' in the distance. We had tea at 'Compstall' and then walked into 'Marple' it was a lovely outing and we did enjoy it. We came home by train from Marple and they brought us home. (Berry diary, April 1<sup>st</sup> 1904 (Good Friday)).

After dinner we all went by train to Chorlton, and then walked to Stretford and then we got on the top of the bus, and went to Urmston house hunting, it was a beautiful day and we had our tea at a shop. Coming home we had a cab from Stretford station to Chorlton station and caught the three minutes to seven train home. (Berry diary, May 10<sup>th</sup> 1905).

In the mid-nineteenth century John Leeson and his family had fewer transport options than Ida Berry but, especially for longer-distance travel outside London, it was common to mix transport modes without apparent difficulty. Usually this meant initially travelling by train to a destination, but then hiring a cab of some sort, though for some trips a journey from London to another coastal location was conducted by boat. The following two examples are typical of such journeys:

We went to Margate by steamer on 9<sup>th</sup> August with Lotty who was very poorly, John and nurse Susan. Had lodgings at Front Crescent , stayed there 6 weeks ... then we went to Ramsgate – Spencer Square - and stayed there 4 weeks. Came home by

Railway, fine country of pasture land, some hops still out. (Leeson diary, August 9<sup>th</sup> to October 11<sup>th</sup> 1855).

Charlotte had a letter from Binnie at Mundelsey – the morning they left here – at the station they telegraphed to Norwich for Cooper's Coach to wait for them there, they went by it and a Fly home – all the people glad to see them. (Leeson diary, November 19<sup>th</sup> 1859).

Some 70 years later Gerald Fitzmaurice also travelled extensively around London and further afield both for pleasure and in connection with his work (for a period he was Marshal to a circuit judge in south-west England). The precise mode is not specified for much of his everyday travel around London, though from what is written it can be assumed that it was all either on foot or by a variety of forms of public transport. He commented in detail on the impact of the 1926 General Strike on London transport, and in doing so gives a vivid picture of the range of different transport modes that Londoners normally had access to. He was strongly against the strike, signed up for 'volunteer service', and seemed disappointed when it ended.

The strike is in being. All trams and buses have stopped, also tubes and underground trains etc. and Dockers and others. Taxis and private buses are on the streets.

Everybody is getting to work on motor bikes and push bikes, lorries, charabancs and private cars. The embankment, Whitehall, Strand etc. were a sea of vehicles during the rush hours. (Fitzmaurice diary, May 4<sup>th</sup> 1926).

Although in normal times transport in London mostly appeared to work well, when travelling outside London Gerald Fitzmaurice quite often complained about late trains and poorly connecting transport systems. For instance when travelling from Charmouth (Dorset) to Winchester via Salisbury he complained bitterly about late running buses and trains, though it

should be noted that some trains were still affected by a continuing miners' strike after the General Strike had ended (Morgan 1987).

In summary, the diary entries again demonstrate many similarities with contemporary mobilities. For the most part urban residents had access to a wide range of transport options, these were used interchangeably and except during abnormal conditions (such as the General Strike) interconnections between different transport modes were mostly unproblematic. The residents of British cities may have encountered rapidly changing and expanding transport options in the century after 1840, with new sites, forms and speeds of mobility, but these personal accounts suggest that they negotiated them without undue difficulty.

### **The persistence of old forms of mobility**

One implication of the 'new mobilities paradigm' (Sheller and Urry 2006), is that distinctly new forms of movement have become available and that these have changed the ways in which we travel. As outlined above, although urban residents did have an ever expanding portfolio of transport options from which to choose, for the most part they quickly became familiar with them and used them interchangeably and with ease. Moreover, detailed analysis of the diaries studied also shows that more traditional means of travel remained commonplace. This was especially the case for travel on foot. Walking is probably the only form of everyday transport that has not changed over time. The way in which we walk and the speeds at which we walk are essentially the same today as they were several centuries ago. It could be argued that increased affluence, leading to improvements in health, nutrition and stature, and to the ownership of warmer and more waterproof clothes and footwear, should have made walking easier. However, despite such changes, rates of walking in Britain have declined progressively during the twentieth century. According to National Travel

Survey data, in 1975/6 walking accounted for 34.8 per cent of all trips undertaken whereas by 2015 only 22 per cent of journeys were on foot (Department for Transport 2016). Accurate data for earlier periods are not available, but research on the journey to work (Pooley and Turnbull 2000b) suggests that in the first decade of the twentieth century approximately half of all commuting trips were on foot, falling to less than 20 per cent by the 1940s and just 6.9 per cent (in England) at the 2011 census. However, it is worth emphasising that even in 2013 walking was the second most important mode of travel (after the car) as measured by frequency of use. Even today walking remains an important (if neglected) form of transport. In the century after 1840 travel on foot was one of the commonest forms of urban transport and was predominant for many journey purposes.

All diarists studied (including those not explicitly mentioned in this paper) recorded many trips on foot. It is also likely that, because of the ubiquity of walking, a high proportion of those journeys where the mode was not specified were undertaken on foot. Travel mode was much more likely to be recorded in a diary where the transport was novel. Moreover, while official surveys usually only record the principal mode of transport it should be remembered that walking could form part of many multiple-mode trips. Thus a journey by bus or by train frequently included a stage on foot: a walk to a station or bus stop. Walking trips could be for a wide variety of purposes: work, pleasure, shopping, visiting friends, to save money or to gain exercise. All these are recorded in the diaries studied: a small selection is given in Box 1. Walking for pleasure and exercise was most frequently recorded, but diarists also recorded walking to visit friends and relatives, to go shopping, and to travel to or from work. Because of the mundane and taken-for-granted nature of the activity it is impossible to ever identify all the journeys where walking was involved, but it is clear that the oldest and simplest form of mobility continued to be both practically important and pleasurable throughout the period studied. Arguably, this remains the case today.

## **Conclusions**

This paper has drawn selectively from just six diaries, but even taking into account the much larger sample of diaries studied conclusions must be drawn with caution. As outlined above, diaries are drawn from a sub-set of the total population, we do not know what is omitted, the mundane (including everyday travel) is often not recorded, and feelings or emotions are often missing. However, the evidence presented does allow some cautious conclusions about the ways in which at least some urban travellers interacted with, and responded to, new transport technologies in the period 1840-1940. Evidence from the diaries suggests that the urban travellers engaged positively with the new technologies that were available, for the most part saw them as offering fresh opportunities and improvements in urban travel, embraced faster speeds and the availability of multiple modes that could be combined in a single journey, and used these modes to undertake all the activities that were necessary to sustain and enrich their everyday lives. In this sense, at least, they were engaging with many of the concepts that have been associated with 'new mobilities'. They travelled frequently and easily and expected to be able to do so, they embraced new technologies and, when delays or difficulties occurred, they mostly took them in their stride, though also showed occasional annoyance. Those journeys that generated more feelings and emotions as recorded in the diaries, tended to be those that were unusual, and that often generated frustration, fear or pleasure. However, at the same time as these new transport forms were being incorporated into everyday urban life, old forms of transport persisted. In particular, travel on foot, often over considerable distances, continued to be common and the normal means of travel for many. Given that all the diarists studied were relatively affluent and could afford fares for buses, trams, trains and cabs, it is reasonable to assume that those with far fewer resources, and for whom diaries rarely exist, were even more likely to travel on foot for reasons both of convenience and cost.

Based on the evidence presented here I argue that the concepts embodied in the ‘new mobilities paradigm’ are as relevant to past mobilities as they are for the present. The connections between mobility and social and economic life stressed by Urry in the quote at the beginning of this paper as central to mobilities studies are clearly present in the accounts presented here. But rather than the experience and expectations of mobility being something that was new in the late-twentieth and twenty-first centuries, evidence from the diaries demonstrates that the same characteristics were present a century or more earlier. For instance the situations that generated emotions that were recorded in the diaries echo those shown in contemporary studies of mobility and affect (Katz 1999; Sheller 2004), and past travellers engaged with at least as many multiple modes as exist today. This is not to argue that nothing has changed over the past 160 years, and this paper has not considered the increased role of virtual mobilities provided by the internet and social media, but I do argue that the similarities between the past and the present are striking. Mobilities theories can be used as an analytical tool for past societies and the characteristics of ‘new’ mobilities have been present for much longer than is sometimes suggested.

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**Table 1: The diaries**

<b>Name of diarist</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Date of birth</b>	<b>Location during diary</b>	<b>Dates of diary</b>	<b>Location of source</b>
John Leeson	House proprietor	1803	London	1846-1865	Bishopsgate Institute archive (GDP/8)
John Lee	Apprentice draper	1842	Lancashire	1859-64	Private collection
Elizabeth Lee*	None	1867	Merseyside	1884-1892	Published: Pooley et. al. 2010
Ida Berry	None	1884	Manchester	1902-1907	Bishopsgate Institute archive (GDP/28)
Gerald Gray Fitzmaurice	Lawyer	1901	London and elsewhere	1926-1927	Bishopsgate Institute archive (GDP/52)
Rhona Little	Typist	1919	Londonderry then London	1932-59	Private collection

\*Daughter of John Lee

**Table 2: Licensed vehicles, Great Britain, 1909-1939 (000s)**

Year	Private cars	Goods vehicles	Motor cycles, scooters and mopeds	Buses	All licensed motor vehicles
1909	53	30	36	24	143
1920	187	101	228	75	591
1930	1,056	349	712	101	2,272
1939	2,034	488	418	90	3,148

Source: Department for Transport, Vehicle Statistics, Table VEH0103

(<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/veh01-vehicles-registered-for-the-first-time>)

### **Box 1: The variety of walking**

In afternoon Charlotte, I, Lotty and Johnny walked in St James' Park – the park full of Holidays folk and children – tag rag and bob tail – all very happy. (Leeson diary, April 15<sup>th</sup> (Good Friday) 1854).

Rode in the Mail Coach to Linton, fare 1/6, which I think is far too much for 9 miles & I should have walked, if I had been sure it would be fine. (John Lee diary, July 30<sup>th</sup> 1863)

I went to the shop tonight. Mrs. Hope was there. Pa and I walked home together (nearly 12, o'clock.) I was so tired. (Elizabeth Lee diary, May 24<sup>th</sup> 1884)

Maud and I went on the top of the tram to from Withington to All Saints [shopping trip] ... we walked all the way home. (Berry diary June 14<sup>th</sup> 1906).

On Tuesday night I decided I would go up North and see the Eclipse, and took the 11.5 from Euston to Preston. I arrived at Preston about 3.20. I knew that if I walked for 5 miles or so in either a due northerly or due westerly direction I should be in the line of central totality and proceeded to do this with the help of a pocket compass. I found a road going north and marched steadily along it. (Fitzmaurice diary, June 30<sup>th</sup> 1927).

This morning I went out with Lisle to get some things. ... Then we went on to Crooks, Betty came up just before we got to it. I got two white spencers and a vest and one pair of panties = 4/6. Then I walked down a bit with Lisle and Betty. I then met Joan Hatrick and had to walk back with her. I then went to Woolworth's ... (Little diary, January 27<sup>th</sup> 1938, Londonderry).