Though it is my intention to confine this paper as far as possible to Queensland it would be impossible to give a comprehensive picture of early road transport without going back to its first stages in the older colonies.

The subject of inland transport first became a problem after the discovery of the passes over the Blue Mountains and the spread of settlement beyond. The conveyance of merchandise, mails and passengers early became in present day parlance a bottle-neck to progress.

Early passenger coaches in use were of the heavy springless type as used in England. Cumbersome enough on the made roads of the Old Country, they were a night mare on the crude colonial tracks. A trip from Sydney to Bathurst in one of these vehicles in 1852 is graphically described in the "Letters of Rachael Henning" which appeared in serial form recently in the Sydney "Bulletin." It was a recital of break-downs, nights spent bogged in creeks, and sleeping in uncomfortable roadside shanties.

The first mail deliveries in the vicinity of Sydney were done by the military, but the rapid rise of the population and the extension of business following the gold discoveries made a quicker and more reliable service imperative.

Freeman Cobb, an American, who had been through the '49 gold rush in California, came to Australia to seek fortune on the Victorian gold fields. Not successful in his mining ventures, he was, however, quick to see the opportunity offering for an organised passenger transport. He was joined by three fellow-countrymen. They were Murray Peck, James Swanton, and John Tamber. These men founded the famous mail contracting firm of Cobb and Co. so well known to later generations of Australians. From California they imported the first thoroughbrace coach (There is no evidence of import licences existing in those days). These coaches in place of steel springs were swung on stout leather braces, much lighter and more suitable for rough roads. The year was 1853. The founder's
connection with the business, however, was brief. Before the end of the decade the interests of Cobb and Co. were acquired by a group of squatters and businessmen headed by yet another American, James Rutherford, under whose guidance an Australian wide expansion began.

In 1861 Cobb and Co. secured the mail carrying monopoly of Victoria. The company set up its head office at Bathurst, which remained its headquarters for 50 years. On 16th November 1861 an imposing cavalcade left Bendigo to open the new service over the border. It consisted of 10 coaches, two feed waggons, 150 horses, and 25 employees, drivers, grooms, repair men, and harness makers.

The Company made its first appearance in Queensland in 1865 when one of their road managers, Harry Barnes, opened offices in Mary Street and put a coach on the Brisbane-Ipswich run, shortly to be extended to the new Gympie gold-field, to Warwick, and as far west as Roma via Condamine. The Barnes family later became noted Northern Rivers and Queensland pastoralists and breeders of some of the finest thoroughbreds to grace the Australian Turf, namely Rivoli, A.J.C. Derby (1921), High Syce (1930), and Basha Fileka, Caulfield Cup (1951) winners.

In 1870 in the eastern States the Company harnessed 6,000 horses daily and their coaches travelled 28,000 miles weekly. They received in mail subsidies £95,000 and a further £185,000 from the carriage of passengers and parcels—being prior to the parcel post era. Their annual pay roll exceeded £100,000.

As early as 1864 the Company had purchased Buckinguy Station in N.S.W. By 1890 they had 16 large sheep and cattle holdings extending from the Victorian border to North Queensland, having that year completed the purchase of Devonport on the Diamantina River.

Development took place in every branch of industry and commerce by the Company or its principal shareholders. Walter Hall invested and made a huge fortune in Mt. Morgan (The Walter and Eliza Hall Trust has its origin in this venture). They were contractors for the Glen Innis—Tenterfield Railway which involved the Company in heavy loss.
In developing the jarrah trade between India and West Australia Cobb and Co. made its sole financial contact with that State, the only State that never saw a Cobb and Co.'s coach. James Rutherford was the father of heavy industry in Lithgow. It was he who founded the Eskbank Iron Works in that town.

At Dubbo a coach building works had been established and in 1886 they brought craftsmen and wheelwrights to Charleville, Queensland, where for 30 years they built for themselves and the public some of the finest vehicles ever turned out in Australia.

Cobb and Co.'s. Abbot buggies were famous. These they delivered free to the purchaser in any part of the State where their Mail routes existed, being towed behind their coaches from factory to buyers.

Cobb and Co.'s. road organisation consisted of a series of mail changes as they were called: at these posts established every 20 miles or so a fresh change of horses was available, also a meal, or if a night was spent a bed for passengers at a very moderate fee. As Royal Mail carriers their drivers were not compelled to close gates, could use private roads in time of floods, and cut any fence except those maintained by the Divisional Rabbit Boards. For sixty years this pioneer service was the life line of the outback; as the railways pushed out Cobb and Co.'s coaches moved on ahead. Neither droughts, floods, nor bushrangers stopped them. The coaches, drawn by usually 5 or 7 horses, had some famous "whips" as the drivers were called. These men enjoyed great popularity amongst the travelling public. Besides being experts with the reins they had a long string of stories to while away the miles for the box seat passengers—and the stories had to have variety, one say for a clergyman another to the taste of a cattle buyer or a miner. Verlie Desmond, an Anglo-Irish lady of very snobbish views in colonials, wrote a book very uncomplimentary to us called "The Awful Australians," in which she wrote "Australia, the whole place reeks of horse sweat and stable dirt." Cobb and Co. in its heyday was all that.

James Rutherford after guiding the activities of Cobb and Co. for over half a century died at Mackay on 13th September 1911 while in a tour of inspection of his Company's properties, aged 84 years. With him
passed in a great measure the driving force of the enterprise.

The years 1914-1915 were extremely dry years over most of the territory served by the company's mail service. The condition of their horses deteriorated and they were compelled to sublet some of their lines to people with motor lorries. Actually they purchased a few lorries themselves and there was discussion of mechanising the mail runs, but in the absence of any great successor to Rutherford the Company adopted a policy of the line of least resistance. Many of the contracts were of long term ones up to 7 years and as these expired they did not attempt to renew them. Their last line from Yeulba to Surat ceased in 1924. Thus after 71 years of sterling yeoman service to this country the firm of Cobb and Co. ceased to be a carrier of the Royal Mail.

A similar handicap beset the conveyance of wool and merchandise as did the mail and passenger movement. The earliest transport was by two wheeled dray with narrow 3 inch tyres drawn by 6 or 8 bullocks or 6 draught horses carrying $1\frac{1}{2}$ to 2 tons. It was only possible to load them with 10 or 12 bales of wool. In those days the teams were used by the squatters or country store keepers, but this was found to be un-economic as the drivers frequently went on drinking bouts at the wayside shanties losing the draught stock and often selling the goods. In Queensland the rapid pastoral development of the fifties and sixties caused a boom in carrying needs and many men started with their own teams hauling for the pastoralists from the principal ports of Ipswich, Maryborough and Rockhampton, later to transfer themselves to the rail heads of the lines that pushed out from Toowoomba and from Westwood in Central Queensland.

By 1860 sheep were firmly established on the Warrego River, and on the Thompson and Barcoo, the former 480 miles distance from Brisbane the latter a similar distance from Rockhampton. The flat western plains made inevitable a large type of vehicle. About this time appeared the box waggon with 5 inch tyres and capable of carrying 6 or 8 tons as with the increased size of load the traction force was increased requiring 16 or 18 oxen or about 14 horses. As 60 per cent. of the loading was wool, about the end of
the century a type of waggon was especially designed for it. This waggon was known as the table top, having no sides, but having a slight float—that is the rear and front being about 2 inches higher than the centre: the idea was that it would cause the towering loads of baled wool to work to the middle and steady the high load. Another innovation was the fore or pony wheels only 5 feet high were completely under the decking, thus making it possible to make shorter turns on bush roads. The rear wheels were about 7 feet high rising about 8 inches above the table top.

There is considerable controversy as to the original designer but it is generally conceded that Frank Eton, a blacksmith and wheel wright of Bourke, N.S.W., built the first one. The early models had eight inch tyres, a great advantage on sandy or muddy roads.

The expansion of this type reached its zenith in 1913 when the famous waggon “Morning Star” was built for carrier Hewsen Marks by a noted waggon builder, William Grice, of Charleville, Queensland. This monster was capable of carrying 14 tons. The price of these waggons was about £150 to £180.

At this period they generally loaded about 60 bales of wool, but loading was regulated by the length of the trip and the seasonal conditions. In dry or extremely wet seasons carriers were inclined to load their draught stock lighter.

The heaviest load to my knowledge was 94 bales of wool from Oakwood to Charleville, a distance of 80 miles. The load was drawn by 27 horses.

Let us now examine the rugged types of men who engaged in this business.

Drawn as they were from bush workers it is not surprising to find that they were in the main Labour Party supporters and their medium of expression was the “Worker” newspaper. In the Shearers’ Strike of 1890 they held aloof, but were generous contributors to funds for the strikers’ families.

They kept the running of the Carriers’ Union strictly in their own hands, not allowing their paid secretaries to formulate their policy for them. As an instance the branch secretary at Charleville already in receipt of £5 per week, a substantial wage at the time, suggested to the local committee that owing to rising living costs his salary be increased to £8. There
was a sheepish silence until the president, William Kart, a direct man and who evidently placed little value on education said, “No man with a pen is worth more than £3 per week, but how will six quid do you?” A real take it or leave it style.

The same secretary got leave of absence to oppose Tolmie in Toowoomba at the 1915 General Election. Though defeated he did well enough to have another attempt at a bye-election. Permission was grudgingly given, but he was informed “to make up his mind if he wished to be their secretary or a Member of Parliament.” Perhaps they considered politicians superfluous.

There is little data left to-day of the dealings between the carriers and the representatives of the pastoralists, nor is there any records of Arbitration Court proceedings; as far as I know it was direct negotiation between the parties which were carried on without acrimony or recrimination on either side. The Carriers’ Union has been many years defunct and all books and records seem to be lost with the passing of time. The secretary of the A.W.U. in Charleville, and the Editor of the “Worker” were very courteous to my recent enquiries on the subject, but they could give no information of any records of the Union. I was able to discover, however, that Ernest Henery, who developed the great Australian mine, Cloncurry, paid in 1878 £9/16/0 per ton for the carriage of copper ore to Normanton. In 1918 at the height of the carriers’ organisation they were paid 1/8 per mile per ton for wool, heavy loading such as bore casing, which in those days formed a great deal of the outward loading, was double rate. It can be said to the credit of the members of the Carriers’ Union that they were well aware of their responsibility towards the public and applied no stand-over tactics. Their Union could not be strictly called a trade union; it was as though they were aware of the fact that they were in reality a Master Carriers’ Association.

A carrier on the road moved as a self contained unit. They travelled singly or for mutual assistance several teams together. A married man was often accompanied by his wife and family who had for conveyance a covered waggonette drawn by 2 quiet horses which the woman drove herself. A feature of the waggon was a 30 gallon cask carried at the rear of the
waggon containing water for domestic use and to water his saddle horse. His was a life of early rising: he usually had his bullocks or horses mustered and harnessed and ready for the day's journey shortly after sunrise. His progress averaged about 12 miles a day. Two indispensible members of his outfit were his saddle horse and cattle dog. A quiet contented horse that after having been given a feed of corn and chaff would stay hobbled out round his camp at night. His trained dog would keep his bullocks or horses in camp while he yoked up and breakfasted: during the day the dog drove his spare stock behind the waggon and chased away strange cattle or horses. Fantastic prices have been payed for these two animals. The carrier himself had to be a jack of all trades; he made his own bullock yokes, mended his harness, and did minor repairs to his waggon.

The carrying days bolstered the wealth of the rail head towns. The teamsters' requirements usually supported two blacksmithing businesses, a saddler, and the usual grocery stores. The transporters of pre-motor days had no oil and motor combine Millstones around his neck. The price of a steer to be broken to work was £6 to £8, and that of a young draught horse £20 to £30. The useful life of a working bullock was to about 8 years and a horse to about 12 years. At those ages the bullock could be fattened and sold to the local butcher. The horse could usually be sold or exchanged to stations always requiring quiet well trained staunch horses.

Many of the wealthy pastoral families of to-day had the foundations of their fortune laid by carrier forebears.

The close of World War I found the teamsters at the peak of their prosperity, but unknown to them the days of the old carriers were numbered. As early as 1911 heavy motor trucks made their appearance on the road in opposition to the horse and bullock teams. They were hampered in every possible manner by the old hands refusing them the usual assistance of the roads, driving their heavy waggons over the by-tracks the motor men had made to avoid heavy patches of sand or falling heavy trees across these roads. This together with the cumbersomeness of the early motor trucks and their operators lack of bush craft and no
proper fuel or mechanical organisation put them off the roads after a very brief period. Many young bushmen, however, who had served in the A.I.F. in Palestine and France however returned with some mechanical and driving experience that they had acquired on active service. Motor trucks had been made more adaptable to bush roads and enterprising motor companies were prepared to give a good fuel and repair service. It was principally these young men, many of whom were sons of carriers about 1920, who began the second assault by the internal combustion engine upon the carrying monopoly and by 1926 they had almost the entire trade and the horse and bullock teams had disappeared from the roads for ever.

While no one will deny the advantages we have derived from petrol and dieseline driven transport there are a few disadvantages. Huge sums of money leave the country annually in payments for oil and rubber. It has caused centralization—one of Australia's greatest curses—to the big cities where the big motor companies have their headquarters.

We have unfortunately come to speak in a derogatory manner of what is termed "the horse and buggy days," but it must be remembered that all the early pioneering with the difficulties of building up this great country was done by such men as the old carriers by the primitive methods of those days. Our fine Clydesdale horses are becoming fewer each year in the show rings throughout the Commonwealth. In fact now their principal use is to be slaughtered to feed greyhounds, and the shades of the old carriers have receded into the limbo of the forgotten.