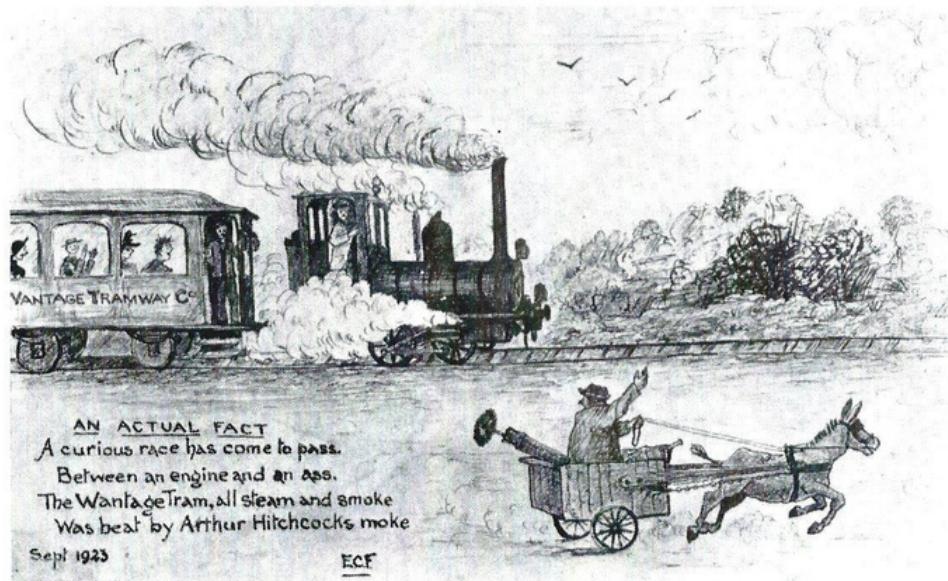


# Arthur Hitchcock and his Moke

By Trevor Hancock



**A curious race has come to pass  
Between an engine and an ass;  
The Wantage tram, all steam and smoke,  
Was beat by Arthur Hitchcock's Moke.**

This short piece of doggerel accompanies the sketch shown here which depicts a famous incident involving the Wantage Tramway in 1923. It was drawn by EC Float a keen amateur artist staying at the Bell Public House in Grove. So what actually happened and who was Arthur Hitchcock?

Arthur Hitchcock was born in 1863 in Enstone Oxfordshire and came to Grove around 1880 and married his wife Julia (nee' Barwick) in 1883. Arthur and Julia set up home at 2, Kents Row in Grove opposite what is now the Millbrook Shopping Centre. Arthur was keen on topiary and his home is usually recognisable in old photographs of the row of cottages. The couple had 12 children, 8 of whom would survive him. Initially Arthur found work with the Great Western Railway, however circa 1895 he lost his right leg in an accident.



Kents Row in Grove where Arthur and Julia set up home



Arthur with his family in Grove circa 1930s



Arthur in his adapted wheelchair

Railway work and most forms of manual labour were now impossible, so Arthur Hitchcock set himself up as a chimney sweep. He took himself round the district, initially by self-propelled cart and buying a donkey called Jim to haul himself, his brushes, brooms and rods. The vicar of Grove, the Revd Stanley Howard, was good enough to allow Hitchcock to pasture his donkey next door in the vicarage orchard. He also used a wheelchair with an extension on the front so that his dog could have a ride. Arthur also found other work locally as a boot repairer and was a familiar figure locally in his cart.

On this particular day, Arthur had a chimney to sweep in Hanney and decided to call in to the Volunteers Arms on the way home for a 'quick one'. What happened next is explained in an interview Arthur gave to the North Wilts Herald in 1934.

Jim the donkey was sedately pulling him home along the Station Road towards Grove beside the tramway track which carried passengers to Wantage from Wantage Road Station. It was at this point that the Wantage bound tram came up behind them to overtake and Jim took fright. Taking the bit between his teeth Jim bolted and regardless of his owner's vehement protests he carried on until he had far outstripped the train placidly chuff-chuffing along behind.

**"Ah ole Jim could shift when he had a mind to"** said Arthur. **"Why when I vast had that donk he weren't hardly strong enough to pull me but I hadn't had un long avore he run away with me two or three times. I just see-sawed at the reins that time until he pulled up, but a chap who saw it happen, he were a Londoner and he sketched it. Then that sketch were printed on a postcard and that's the one you've seen."**

Later E C Float did a painting of the event which hung in the Bell pub for many years – it is now in the Vale and Downland Museum in Wantage. Arthur continued in his interview

**"Made the driver of the tram ratty I can tell 'ee. "an every time arterwards when I passed un, I'd beckon un on. Just arter that the old tram came off the line and we always said a were so hurt to his pride as being wacked by a moke that a tried to commit suicide".**



The Volunteer Arms



Wantage Tramway: The site of the 'race'.

Arthur Hitchcock became a local celebrity and to this day this 'race' is remembered both by local people and those with an interest in the Wantage Tramway. When he died in 1942, Arthur was the oldest member of the Grove district branch of the Royal Berkshire Friendly Society and was missed by all.



Jim the donkey with Arthur's daughters Florence and Nancy

## References

- The North Wilts Herald 19th January 1934
- An Artists Walk Around Grove Volumes 2 and 4 by Bill Fuller 1987.
- Vale of the White Horse by Nigel Hammond 1999

## Acknowledgements

- The Vale & Downland Museum Wantage
- Mr Bev Pocock

**Trevor Hancock**

**White Horse Ancestors**

**23rd July 2021**