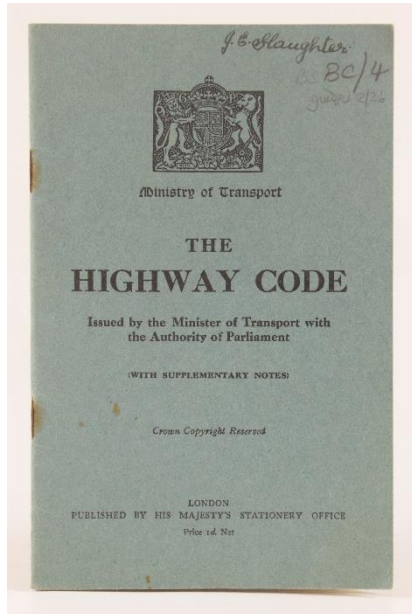


The Highway Code

By Roy Fletcher



Most of us are aware of the Highway Code, even if some of the 304 pieces of information, advice, guides and rules are but a distant memory. The Highway Code was first published in 1931 by the Ministry of Transport priced at one penny. The Bishops Stortford Museum has an early copy of the Code, possibly the 2nd edition which was published in 1934 and contained road signs – all 8 of them!

Another indication of the way life was so much simpler in the 30's – there were only 107 pieces of information and rules to contend with.

Reading through the booklet there are many rules similar to those in the present day version. However, part two is particularly interesting. The number of current drivers who are aware of hand signals must be dwindling, so a reminder here could be worthwhile.

- 1) I am going to slow down or stop. Extend the right arm with the palm of the hand turned downwards and move the arm slowly up and down, keeping the wrist loose.
- 2) I am going to turn to my right. Extend the right arm and hand, with the palm turned to the front, and hold them rigid in a horizontal position straight out from the off side of the vehicle. (One wonders how many occasions a driver's hand met with another coming in the opposite direction and also turning right)
- 3) I am ready to be overtaken. (The overtaking driver must satisfy himself that he can overtake with safety). Extend the right arm and hand below the level of the shoulder, and move them backwards and forwards. (Clearly, drivers were a lot happier to be overtaken in the 30's)
- 4) I am going to turn to my left. Extend the right arm and rotate it from the shoulder in an anti-clockwise direction.

And finally, in addition to the aforementioned signals, two additional signals applied to horse-drawn vehicles.

- 5) I am going to stop. Raise the whip vertically, with the arm extended above the right shoulder.
- 6) I am going to turn. Rotate the whip above the head; then incline the whip to the right or left to show the direction in which the turn is to be made.

Given that many motorists today don't seem to worry about how indicators work in their car, one wonders how much drivers in the 30's bothered with hand signals at all.

The museum's copy of the highway code is currently on display at the Bishop's Stortford Museum in the Rhodes Arts Complex.

The Bishop's Stortford Museum is your first choice for discovering the history of the town. With a mix of local history displays, holiday activities and themed walks and talks, we have something to offer the whole family. Admission to the museum is free and is open Monday –Friday 10am to 5pm and from 10am – 4pm on Saturday's.

Researched and written by Roy Fletcher.

Roy has been a volunteer at the museum for six years, spending his time cataloguing the museum's collection. Roy has an interest in the local history, particularly the last 200 years.