Most people in Tudor times did not travel very far from where they lived. They grew their own food or bought things at the local market. Some people had to travel to sell goods or visit relatives. For short distances, small loads were often carried by packhorses. This happened if they were selling things at market.

For longer distances, or heavier loads, horses and carts were used. The roads were not very good. No roads had been made since Roman times – 1500 years earlier. Travel on the roads was slow and uncomfortable. In wet weather the roads became muddy and rutted and it was difficult to travel very far in a day.

Few people travelled about very little and when they did it would have been on foot or in a horse-drawn carriage. ‘Stage wagons’ were called this because the journeys were made in stages, each of about twelve miles. They travelled at about 2 miles per hour and had no proper seats. Passengers sat on the floor among straw or on bales of any soft goods that the wagon might be carrying. It is unlikely that people travelled unless they had to.

Goods were usually transported on packhorses because horses could go where carts could not. As road journeys were often hazardous, people tended to travel together and avoided travelling after dark. Often merchants and their packhorses would travel together in a long line called a ‘pack-horse train’.

Why were road journeys often dangerous?

It was often easier to send bulky or heavy loads by water. Barges and small sailing ships used to sail along the rivers and around the coast. There was less danger from thieves who would steal goods carried by road. Sea travel was not completely safe. Storms could sink small ships and lives and goods would be lost.

THE QUEEN’S PROGRESS

There are several pictures showing Elizabeth I travelling. A litter would be used for short journeys – a favourite subject for portrait painters as it enabled them to paint the Queen in all her finery. Travelling on a litter also became part of an elaborate public relations exercise as it enabled people to see their Queen. This sense of ceremony still exists today when members of the royal family use stagecoaches on special occasions.

What was a litter?