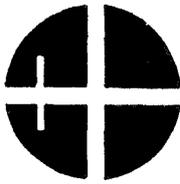


MIDLAND MAIL



THE BULLETIN OF THE MIDLAND (G.B.) POSTAL HISTORY SOCIETY



President: Rev. C.M. Beaver

Chairman:
Mike Young

Treasurer:
Trevor Clewley

Secretary:
Eric Lewis

Number 85, June 1994

Although the books produced by this Society are very much a team effort, involving many members, the fact that they are acknowledged by people outside the Society to be of a high standard and do actually appear in print is largely because of the enthusiasm of our Coordinating Editor, John Calladine. So it is fitting, that John should be awarded Honorary Life Membership. Elsewhere on this page he states that he will strive to live up to this award. The article the first part of which appears in this issue shows that his response will certainly not be inadequate.

NEW MEMBERS

We extend a warm welcome to the following:

Dr. M.A. Cox, from Didcot, whose collecting interests include Wolverhampton and Willenhall;

Miss Maxine Barrow, from Leicester, who collects Leicestershire;

Mr. R.N. Ricketts who has rejoined our Society after losing touch with us for two or three years;

Mr Peter Thompson, from Sheffield, whose interests include Derbyshire and Liverpool.

A LETTER FROM THE CO-ORDINATING EDITOR

Dear Editor,

May I please be allowed precious space in 'Midland Mail' to express my sincere thanks to the members of the Society for the very special gift of Honorary Life Membership bestowed at the AGM. It came as a complete surprise, not least because the Society's books are undoubtedly a team effort and an obvious labour of love. I am utterly delighted with the award and especially mindful of the kind thought behind it, with so many members taking the trouble to write to our Hon Secretary. It will be hard to live up to this honour but I shall strive to do so, probably somewhat inadequately.

Thank you all

John Calladine

THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING AND AUCTION

This took place on 23rd April at St Michael's Parish Rooms, Langley. After the minutes of the previous AGM had been taken as read, our Chairman gave his report. He said that his third year had been one of contrasts. We had the very sad loss of one of our founder members Peter Sharp, a quiet and thoughtful enthusiast.

On the up-side, in addition to a varied and well supported programme, we had our greatest achievement in the launch of our Penny Post book, on time, and very well received by all those who had purchased copies. It was a project so monumental that if we had really understood what we were getting into, the whole project might have foundered. But we stuck to our guns and Group Captain John navigated us through tricky currents and kept us on target. Mike thanked all those who had contributed in any way to our finest project.

Unfortunately, he had been unable to attend all the meetings, but in his absence our President had kept things going in fine spin. We had enjoyed our annual visit to the Bass Museum with an unusual talk on preservation. Two of our members, Harold Wilson and Dave Tarry, had given superb displays for our entertainment. Most of the other meetings had consisted of the usual miscellany from our members which as always had proved interesting.

Mike then went on to thank the officers of the Society who had given him tremendous support: Eric for his efficiency and hard work on behalf of the Society; Trevor Clewley for ensuring that the finances of the Society had never been stronger; John Soer for producing Midland Mail which is always full of information; and finally, Sharon who provides our liquid refreshments without any fuss, and is a key member of the team.

Trevor Clewley then took us through the annual accounts. The ease with which he did this suggests that he would make a very good Chancellor of the Exchequer for not only did he not impose VAT on the annual subscription he recommended that it remain unchanged at £6.

The Editor announced the award of the Jon Baker trophy to John Calladine for his article on the "X-Marks of the Great Cross Post". He appealed for articles, long or short, for Midland Mail.

Our Co-ordinating Editor reported that 250 copies of the local posts book had been printed. Of these only 35 remained in stock. It was intended to publish a fourth edition of the UDC book, probably in early 1996, which would contain a section on Oxfordshire plus other additional material.

Although this was the end of Mike Young's three year stint as Chairman he had been asked by the Committee to continue for another year as illness had prevented him from attending a number of meetings. The other officers had also agreed to remain in their posts. Alan Godfrey had kindly agreed to take over from 'Ches' as the county editor for Warwickshire. 'Ches' offered to act as our MPF representative in place of Trevor.

John Calladine reported that it was intended that the Society would have display boards in the TPO on the Severn Valley Railway at busier weekends throughout the summer.

The programme for the next season was then announced. This appears after the auction realisations.

The AGM was concluded with the presentation of Honorary Life Membership to John Calladine. Our President outlined the time and energy that John had devoted to ensuring that not only was the local posts book produced on time but also that the introduction can be regarded as the definitive article on the subject.

After a brief break, we then proceeded to the auction in which 84% of the lots were sold. The realisations are below. Any numbers not listed were unsold.

A 14.00	D 2.00	G 1.00	H 3.00	I 1.00
1 4.00	2 25.00	3 5.00	4 14.00	5 6.00
6 10.00	8 12.00	9 5.00	10 6.50	11 4.00
12 6.00	13 8.00	15 33.00	17 6.00	18 6.00
19 6.00	20 12.00	21 2.00	22 2.40	23 5.50
24 5.59	25 7.00	26 2.00	28 1.00	29 2.50
30 1.50	31 4.00	33 9.00	34 9.00	35 14.00
36 9.00	38 4.50	39 9.00	40 4.50	42 4.50
43 2.80	44 10.00	45 13.00	46 10.00	48 1.50
50 2.75	51 4.50	52 4.00	53 4.50	54 7.00
55 6.00	56 2.00	57 0.40	58 5.50	61 6.50
67 0.70	69 6.00	70 5.50	71 6.50	72 3.00
73 4.00	75 1.40	77 4.75	79 22.00	82 3.50
83 3.60	84 7.00	85 12.00	86 9.50	90 12.00
93 4.25	95 3.75	96 6.75	97 15.00	98 5.00
99 8.00	100 4.00	102 5.00	103 6.00	104 4.00
107 11.00	108 7.00	109 1.40	110 0.60	112 5.50
113 2.40	114 2.60	115 2.20	116 8.00	117 1.40
118 2.00	119 11.00	120 0.80	121 9.59	122 3.00
123 2.50	124 2.20	125 4.00	126 1.25	127 9.00
128 17.00	129 40.00	130 11.00	131 5.00	133 8.00
135 3.00	136 3.00	137 5.00	138 8.00	140 12.00
142 28.00	143 24.00	144 24.00	145 14.00	146 20.00
147 14.00	148 2.25	149 0.80	150 9.00	152 1.50
153 4.00	154 4.50	155 1.25	156 1.40	157 1.00
158 6.00	159 3.75	160 1.60	161 2.80	162 3.00
163 7.00	164 1.75	167 4.00	168 3.00	169 4.00
170 3.75	171 2.25	172 1.00	173 1.50	174 1.50
175 1.00	176 1.50	177 16.00	178 1.25	179 1.25
181 2.25	182 2.50	185 1.50	186 6.00	187 1.75
188 1.00	189 2.00	190 20.00	191 1.75	192 2.00
193 2.00	194 4.50	195 6.00	196 1.50	197 7.00
198 2.50	199 5.25	201 2.25	202 4.00	203 1.00
207 2.25	208 2.25	209 1.25	214 1.00	215 10.50
216 2.50	217 1.00	218 2.50	219 3.50	220 5.50
221 1.00	224 3.00	226 3.00	227 4.00	228 1.00
229 1.60	230 1.00	231 1.50	232 13.00	233 1.50
234 2.75	235 8.00	236 4.00	237 1.25	238 1.25
239 5.75	240 5.50	241 10.00	242 10.00	243 13.00
244 6.00	245 4.00	246 7.25	247 7.25	252 4.25
253 4.25	254 6.50	255 6.00	256 5.75	257 7.50
260 10.00	261 14.00	262 5.00	264 2.50	267 7.00
268 2.00				

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PROGRAMME OF MEETINGS, 1994-5

- 17th September 1994 Joint Meeting with the Somerset and Dorset Society at Cranham.
- 8th October 1994 Dr. Ian May - 'Coventry Postal History' at Carrs Lane.
- 5th November 1994 Members' 9 sheet displays - 'As Time Goes By' at Carrs Lane.
- 17th December 1994 'Royal Marines' by Bob Swarbrick at Burton - afternoon display. Static displays by members in the morning.
- 14th January 1995 Members' 9 sheet displays - 'A Winter's Tale' at Carrs Lane.
- 18th February 1995 Roger Broomfield - 'The Aberystwyth Road' at the Guildhall, Worcester, in conjunction with the Three Counties Fair.
- 11th March 1995 Competition Day at Carrs Lane.
- 8th April 1995 Joint Meeting with the Shropshire Society at Shrewsbury.
- 29th April 1995 A.G.M. and Auction at Langley.

The October and January meetings will be preceded by a committee at 12.30 p.m. All the meetings at Carrs Lane will be held in the Deacon's Room with the exception of the November meeting which will be held in the Chapel, and will begin at 1.30 p.m. Times for meetings at other localities will be announced in Midland Mail.

- 10th June 1995 Midpex at the Midlands Sports Centre, Tile Hill, Coventry, where the Society will have a table and display. Details later.



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FIVE OVER SEVERNThe Postal History of the River Ferries below Gloucester, 1750-1850

by John Calladine

Part 1 - Setting the Scene

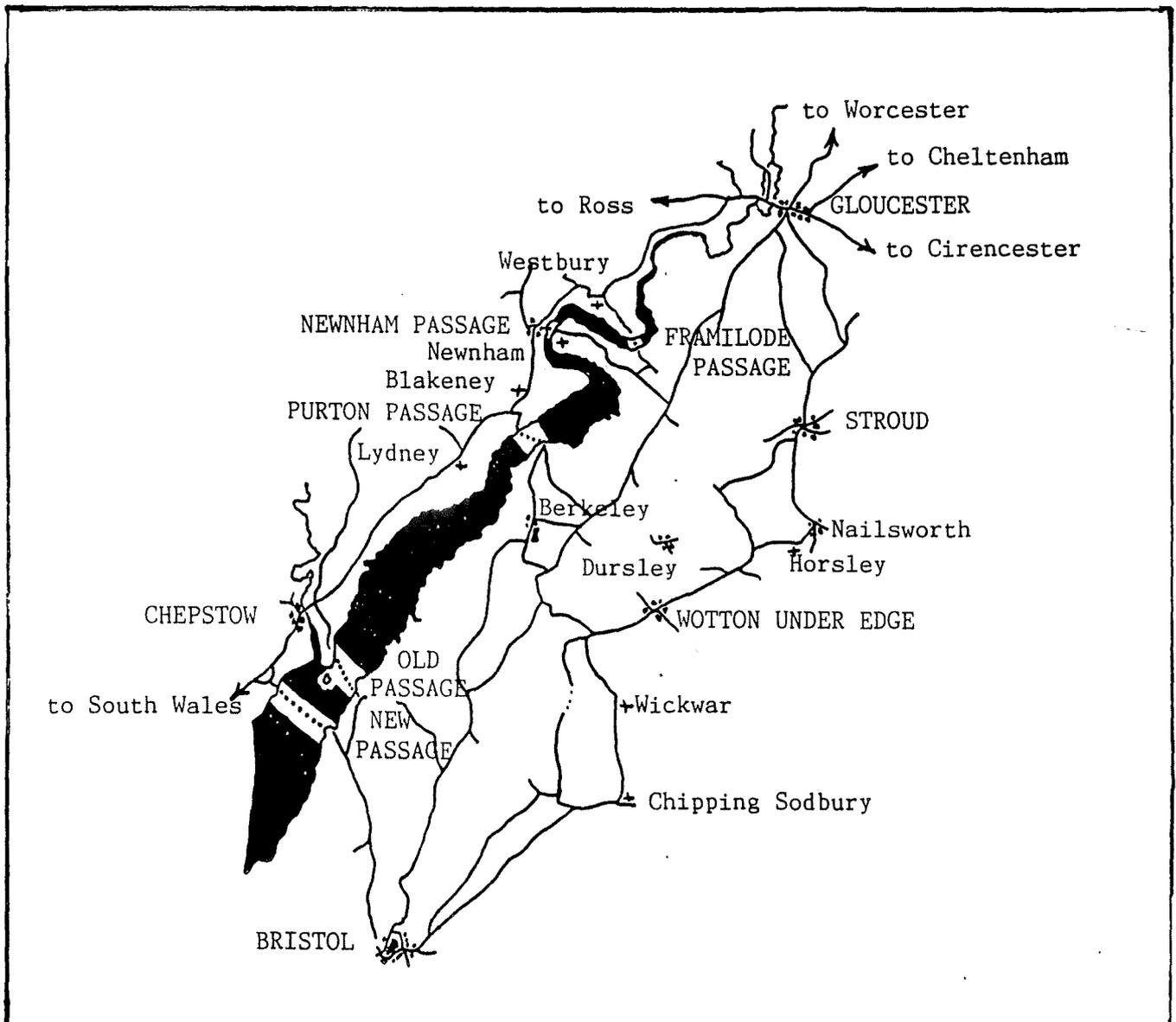
In spite of the well-publicised deficiencies of the English education system, most of us know that the River Severn is the longest river in Great Britain. Rising surprisingly close to the Welsh coast to the north-east of Plynlimon, it follows a semi-circular course eastwards before winding south through Shropshire, Worcestershire and Gloucestershire, finally reaching the Bristol Channel beyond Chepstow. However, if we were asked to nominate the important barriers to early postal communication, we might think of the Pennines or the Irish Sea without giving the River Severn a serious thought. Yet, one may recall, south of the city of Gloucester, the Severn broadens noticeably and becomes tidal. By the time it reaches the Bristol Channel, with Monmouthshire to the west and Gloucestershire to the east, it is more than two miles wide. Much of the river here is shallow, even at high tide, but interlaced with variable, fast-flowing deep water channels. At low tide, muddy flats of sand appear, sometimes extending from the banks and sometimes filling much of the centre of the river. If this were not danger and treachery enough, the cocktail of water rushing down the river and high tide in the Bristol Channel produces what can be a lethal brew. A wall of water, up to four feet high, rushes up the narrowing funnel of the river estuary, threatening to swamp open boats and to drown anyone who happens to be stranded on the sand. Today the Severn Bore is known more as entertainment for sight-seers: even a hundred years ago, it was a much-dreaded phenomenon.

Until the troubled Severn Road Bridge was opened in 1966, there was no bridge over the Severn below Gloucester. From Bristol to Cardiff, the direct distance is about 40 miles. From Bristol to Cardiff via Gloucester, the distance increases to more than 90 miles, even with modern roads, and it would have been in excess of 100 miles throughout the last century. Below Gloucester, therefore, there were and had been for untold centuries, ferry crossings of the river operated by riverside innkeepers with jealously-preserved ancient rights. Their locations remained unchanged and those marked on the first Ordnance Survey maps are those that were marked on Saxton's first county atlas of England and Wales published in 1579 - with one exception. That this came to be known as 'New Passage' should be no surprise.

The chosen title of 'Five over Severn' therefore refers to the five passages of the river south of Gloucester, best identified on the map overleaf. Closest to Gloucester was Framilode Passage from Lower Framilode on the east bank to Rodley Point on the west. The river is probably no more than 600 yards wide here but the ferry followed an oblique course, more or less between two inns, the inn on the western bank known as 'Blue Boys' - a name that may be associated with the Bluecoat School in Gloucester - and that on the east bank, 'The Darrel Arms'. Rivalry between the two innkeepers was said to have been intense. The next passage across the river was at the quite important town of Newnham which is about 12 miles below Gloucester on the west bank. The ferry crossed to Arlingham. Newnham is thought to have been settled in its early history principally because of the relative ease of crossing the river here. The Severn is less than a mile wide and, probably from Roman times until the year 1802, it was the only place between Gloucester and the sea where a horse and carriage could reliably ford the river. A shallow bed of rock provided a safe base for much of the ford and a bed of firm sand completed the link. Notwithstanding the ford, a ferry had existed for centuries to enable crossings to be made at all states of the tide. In 1238, Henry III granted an oak tree "to the woman keeping the passage at Newnham" so that she could have a new boat built. In 1802, the river's deep channel changed course

- another of the Severn's treacherous habits - and the sand bar was washed away. Thereafter, the Newnham-Arlingham ferry became a commercial enterprise.

Following the winding river south-west, there was no further crossing until it reached a point where it narrowed significantly at Purton (or Pirton or Pyrton). This point was just above Sharpness on the east bank and close to where a railway bridge was later built across the river. Both sides of the river were known by the name 'Purton', that on the west bank being little more than a mile above the (then) village of Lydney and that on the east bank some three miles north of Berkeley. While Sharpness was of no significance until the opening of the Gloucester and Sharpness Ship Canal (also known as the Gloucester & Berkeley Canal) in 1827, Berkeley was of long historical importance because of Berkeley Castle (where Edward II met his unpleasant fate). It is useful to appreciate that the castle, which is some one and a half miles from the river bank, was traditionally protected by opening sluices and allowing the meadows to flood. This was intentional flooding but, in the winter months, vast areas adjacent to the River Severn on its eastern side could become marshland and virtually impassable.



While the three passages described above were of some local postal significance (as will be discussed much later), the two crossings of the Severn of national importance were those close to the estuary. The first was the 'Old Passage' from

Aust in the east to Beachley in the west. The other crossing was the 'New Passage' between Redwick (Gloucestershire) and St Pierre (Monmouthshire). There had been an ancient passage nearby but, during the Civil War, a group of soldiers was tricked into using it and drowned. The crossing was thereafter closed and when reopened in 1718, became the 'New Passage'. The Old and New Passages provided the principal links between Bristol and South Wales and it is no coincidence that the Severn Railway Tunnel (opened in 1886) and the new Severn Road Crossing (under construction) follow the line of New Passage, while the Severn Road Bridge passes almost directly over Old Passage.

What these two crossings of the Severn shared was their danger and difficulty. The tide at Beachley can rise and fall 30 feet or more. The fierce tides and prevailing south-westerly winds between rocky shorelines made both crossings fearsome in adverse conditions, often aggravated by thick fog. In the early 1720s, Daniel Defoe had come to Old Passage on his famous 'Tour through the Island of Great Britain'. His words are worth quoting in full:

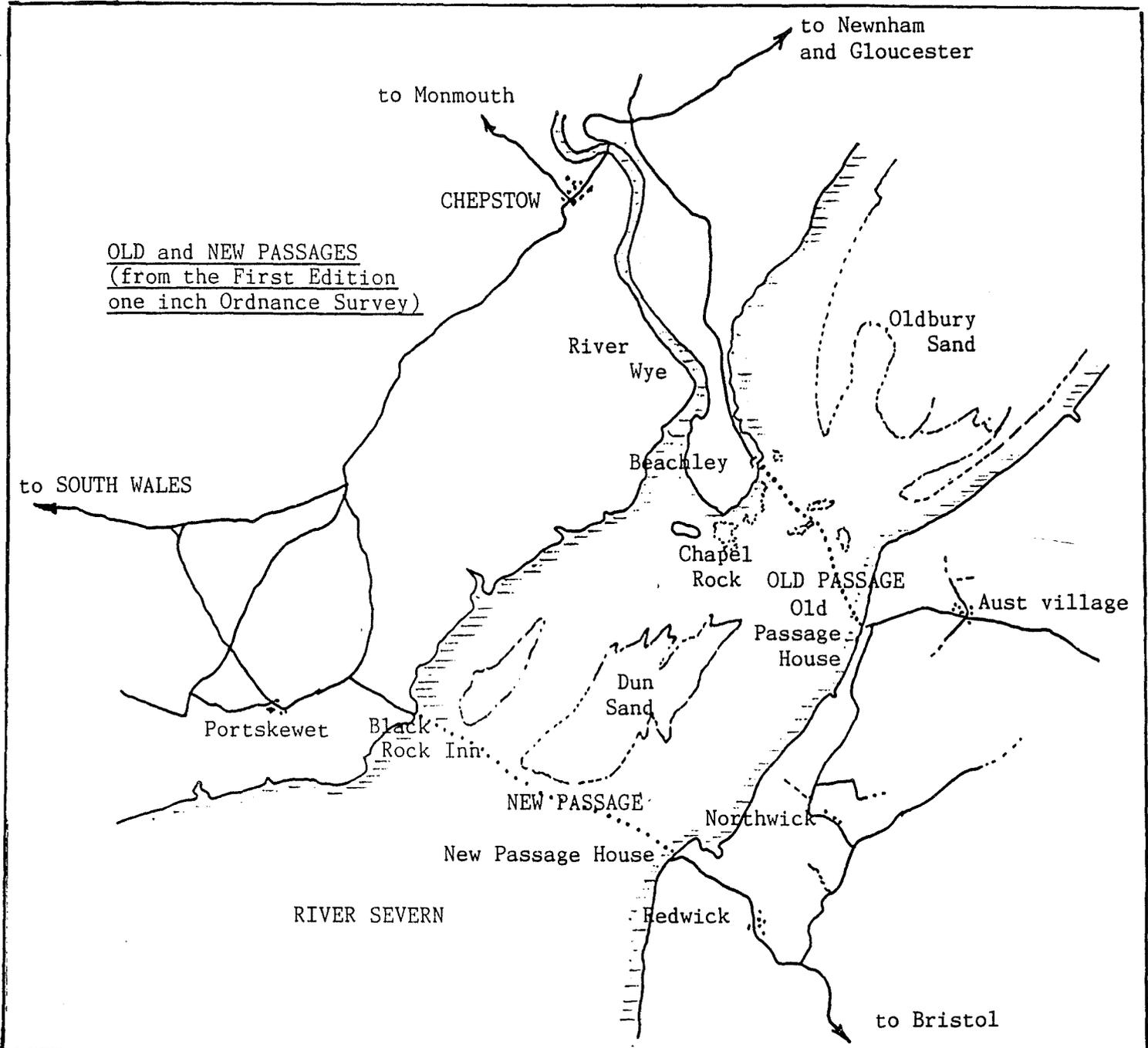
"We came to the ferry called Ast Ferry or, more properly, Aust Ferry or Aust Passage from a little dirty village called Aust near which you came to take the boat. This ferry lands you at Beachley in Monmouthshire so that on the out-side 'tis called Aust Passage and on the other side 'tis called Beachley Passage, from whence you go two little miles to Chepstow . . . When we came to Aust, the hither side of the passage, the sea was so broad, the fame of the Bore of the tide so formidable, the wind also made the water so rough and, which was worse, the boats to carry over both man and horse appeared so very mean, that in short none of us cared to venture. So we came back and resolved to keep on the road to Gloucester."

Defoe claimed that the Severn Bore sometimes produced a wave capable of lifting the stern of a boat not four but seven feet while the bow dug into the bed of the river. No wonder he declined to take Old Passage. If the crossing at Old Passage was bad, that at New Passage was potentially dreadful. In 1823, no lesser an authority than Thomas Telford described New Passage succinctly. "It is", he wrote, "one of the most forbidding places at which an important ferry was ever established".

If a brief description of the five crossings were not enough to put doubts in the mind of any traveller (or post boy or mailcoach passenger), the 'mechanics' of the ferry operations probably would. At Old and New Passages, because of the large tidal changes, ferryboats had to be boarded and unloaded across greasy pontoons and boardwalks and, when larger ferries were introduced, the additional small transitional tender might only add to the difficulty and discomfort for passengers had to change boats twice, out on the river. At the higher ferries, it was usually necessary to walk out to the boat at the eastern bank, other than at high tide. At Purton, the procedure was to wade a small channel near the passage house and then to walk for almost a mile down a ridge of sand in the middle of the river before coming opposite the passage house on the Lydney side. At the Newnham crossing, the ferryman donned thigh boots as he approached Arlingham, draped the passenger across his shoulders (regardless of decorum and weight) and carried him or her the final 50 yards to the bank. In windy conditions or thick fog, this ordeal beggars belief. The ferries themselves were open boats. At Old and New Passages they used sail or oars - or both - depending on prevailing conditions. Even so, there is an authentic report of a ferry boat drifting up and down the centre of the river with the tide for 36 hours, unable to find either bank in the fog and fearful of approaching the unknown shallows in case it struck them and overturned.

Some boats, known as 'ox boats', were specifically adapted to carry animals. They were larger with the gunnel cut on one side to take a wooden ramp. 'Patersons Roads' of 1826 and an earlier list of charges from 1768 make it clear that some boats could carry 2-wheel and 4-wheel carriages but, as we shall see, there is no real likelihood that mailcoaches, even non-patent ones, were taken on ferries

across the Severn. It was not unusual for a large boat, principally carrying animals, to be linked to a smaller boat bearing most of the passengers. In 1777, four boatmen, a passenger, 18 oxen and several horses were drowned in a not-untypical accident at Old Passage but those in the smaller boat had the presence of mind to cut the tow rope and escaped as the larger boat foundered. In 1812, an ox boat sank in ten feet of water at Framilode Passage. The boat was said to be deeply laden with cattle and horses from Ross Fair. Most swam to shore and only the drover was lost. However, in 1786, it was the small passenger boat that was overturned by the wind at Beachley (Old Passage), drowning four boatmen and five passengers. Crossing the Severn by ferry was not for the faint-hearted.



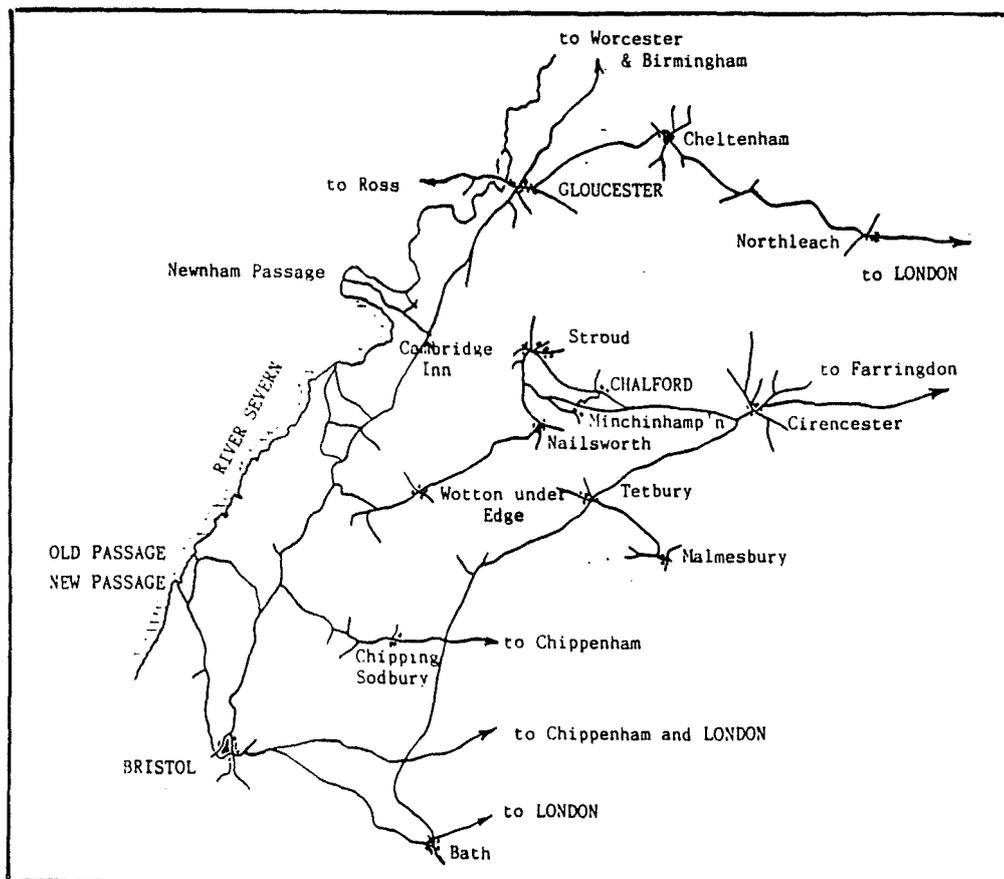
This description of the hazards associated with the ferries is intended to convey something of the potential impediment to communication provided by the lower reaches of the Severn. If, for example, mailcoach passengers hesitated to cross Old and New Passages and chose to take another route, the viability of the service would be affected. If conditions made it impossible for the ferry to cross the river for several hours, unacceptable delays to the mail would be inevitable. However, to gain some impression of the significance of these ferries, we need some broad understanding of postal services directly using them and dependent on them.

(to be continued)

Part 2 - Early Posts and Mailcoaches

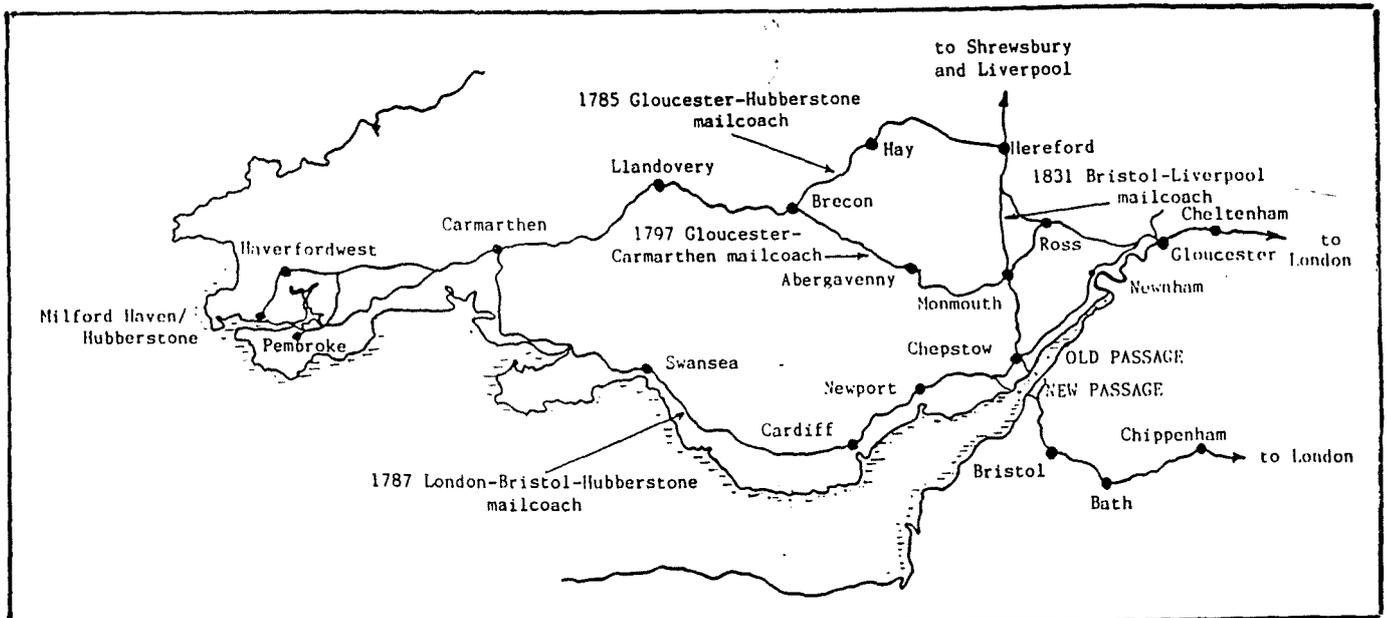
There had been a 'standing post' to Dale, near the Haven mouth at Milford in 1600. Michael Scott Archer has suggested that this connection to Ireland, via Dale, was only made when needed and, in times of peace, allowed to lapse. The local postmasters were then temporarily paid off. A postmaster was paid 20d a day at Chepstow and, at Bristol, a payment "above the ordinarie and former wages" was made "for passing the ferrie at Aust (i.e. Old Passage) and running to Chepstow - 13 miles". By 1659, postmasters had been appointed on the route to Ireland at Monmouth, Newport, Cardiff, Pyle, Swansea, Carmarthen and Pembroke. This would suggest that, by that date, the mail had been switched to the Gloucester-Monmouth-Carmarthen route and no longer used Old Passage. Certainly, by 1755, it can be confirmed that all letters from Bristol and Bath to South Wales were routed through Gloucester.

Gardiner's survey of 1677 includes, among the six great post roads, the Western Road from London to Bristol with a branch at Maidenhead taking mail, by means of a bypost, through Abingdon, Farringdon and Cirencester to Gloucester - a road favoured by the Gloucestershire carriers since medieval times. From Gloucester, letters were carried on into Wales by the same route as in 1659. A reference of 1755 suggests that the post from London to Wales was only twice weekly, on Tuesdays and Saturdays. By that same date, London letters to Bath and Bristol were six-day, three times a week on the Western Road and three times a week through Oxford, Cirencester and Tetbury. From Cirencester, the postmaster took letters three times a week to Wotton under Edge - a service provided from 1693 or earlier - and an unofficial foot post almost certainly continued to serve Berkeley, adjacent to the River Severn.



Running approximately at right angles to these routes, the Great Cross Post followed a route parallel to the River Severn. The original Exeter-Bristol cross post was extended to Chester in 1700, passing through Wotton under Edge and Gloucester. The balance of evidence suggests that the cross post did not follow the road nearest to the east bank of the river (the present A38) but, from Wotton under Edge, probably continued further east through Horsley, Nailsworth and, possibly, Stroud. Again, as with London letters, the postmaster at Gloucester performed a key function. Through him, the South Wales postmasters were paid an extra salary for collecting cross post letters. Gloucester provided not only the link between Bristol and South Wales but also between North Wales and South Wales for communication through mid-Wales was almost non-existent. The importance of Gloucester in the Great Cross Post further suggests that no postal route may have crossed the Severn below Gloucester during the 18th century before the advent of mailcoaches in the 1780s.

As few postal historians will need reminding, John Palmer's plan for the introduction of mailcoaches began with an experimental coach from Bristol and Bath to London on 2nd August 1784. A London-Oxford-Gloucester mailcoach was established on 22nd August 1785 and, on 31st October, this service was extended from Gloucester to Swansea via Newnham, Chepstow, Newport and Cardiff. From the same date, the service was also extended from Gloucester to Hubberstone on the Haven (close to where the town of Milford Haven was later built) via Ross, Hereford, Brecon and Carmarthen. From early in November, the Swansea coach also continued to Carmarthen. The Gloucester-Swansea-Carmarthen coach ran on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays; the Gloucester-Hereford-Milford coach on Sundays, Wednesdays and Fridays. Neither of these routes involved crossing the Severn below Gloucester.



Joyce states that a London-Bristol-Hubberstone (Milford) mailcoach service began in 1786 but a more probable date is mid-1787. This route between London and Milford was longer than the route via Gloucester and it made a ferry crossing of the Severn essential. For reasons that are not clear but possibly to avoid a further small increase of mileage, the chosen ferry was the one at New Passage rather than at Old Passage, effectively by-passing the town of Chepstow. The great advantage of the new route was that it provided a direct link between Bristol and South Wales and Ireland which had strong commercial ties. By 1789 (and quite possibly from 1787), both the mailcoaches into South Wales through Gloucester had been withdrawn as, incidentally, had a direct London mailcoach to Gloucester. The distance given on the timebill for Bristol-Milford was 151 miles and the time allowed was 27 hours. The timebill has been reproduced (reduced) overleaf and it will be seen that one hour was allowed for the crossing at New Passage - and a further

half hour for dinner on the west bank when travelling towards Milford. Whoever completed this particular bill failed to record the number of passengers in the mailcoach but it will be noted that up to six crewmen were required to handle the ferryboat. The timebill may have been a sample completed by Thomas Hasker, Superintendent of Mailcoaches, who made the following observations, based on personal experience of New Passage:

"The Passage is three miles wide at high water and I have often crossed it in 20 minutes but, when the wind blows strong with the tide, it cannot be crossed in less than two hours and a half. In these cases, they are obliged to row about three miles up the river and cross to Chapel Rock, for which purpose the proprietors of the mailcoach engage with the proprietors of the passage to furnish six watermen"

		Miles	Time allowed	Dispatched from the Post-Office, Bristol, the of 179	
		at	M.	at	
				12. 15	30
				Minutes after the Arrival of the London Mail	
	Carr	10	1. 20	With a Time-Piece safe to N ^o	
				Arrived at the New Passage at 1. 35	
				Tide - 3 hours high	
				Wind N.E.	
				Number of Passengers in the Mail Coach, and no other Person but such as are Passengers by the Mail Coach are to be permitted to go in the Mail Boat, by Command of the Postmaster General	
				6 Number of Watermen with the Boat	
				Arrived across the Passage at 2. 35	
				Half an Hour allowed for Dinner	
	Bradley	27	4. 20	Arrived at Cardiff at 7. 25	
		30		Half an Hour allowed for Office Duty and Supper, to be off at Forty Minutes past Eight	
	C. Bradley	12	1. 53	Arrived at Cowbridge at 10. 35	
		18	2. 50	Arrived at Tybach at 1. 25	
	Marmont	16	2. 23	Arrived at Swansea at 3. 50	
		30		Half an Hour allowed for Office Duty and Breakfast, to be off at 25 Minutes after Four	
				Delivered the Time-Piece safe to	
	Nott	27	4. 35	Arrived at Carmarthen at 9. 30	
		30		Half an Hour allowed for Office Duty and Refreshment, to be off at Half an Hour past Nine	
	Owen	32	5. 15	Arrived at Haverfordwell at 2. 45	
		9	1. 20	Arrived at Milford, the of 179	
		151	27	at 1. 5	
				Delivered the Time-Piece safe to N ^o	
				The Bags to be delivered at the Post-Office, Milford, at Four o'Clock in the Afternoon	
				Packet failed at	

THE Time of working each Stage is to be reckoned from the Coach's Arrival Five Minutes for changing four Horses, as much as is necessary, and as the Time whether more or less, is to be staked up in the Coveys of the Stage, it is the Coachman's Duty to be as expeditious as possible, and to report the Horse-Keepers if they are not always ready when the Coach arrives, and active in getting it off.

Command of the Postmaster-General,
T. HASKER.

Because the time of arrival of a mailcoach at the Severn was governed by the despatch of the mails from London and Milford, it would take no account of the

state of the tide. The consequences of this can only be judged from contemporary notices. 'Patersons Roads' of 1826 records that:

" . . . If the wind be northerly, the Severn may be passed at any time for five hours before high water and, if the wind be southerly or westerly, it may be passed for seven hours after high water . . . "

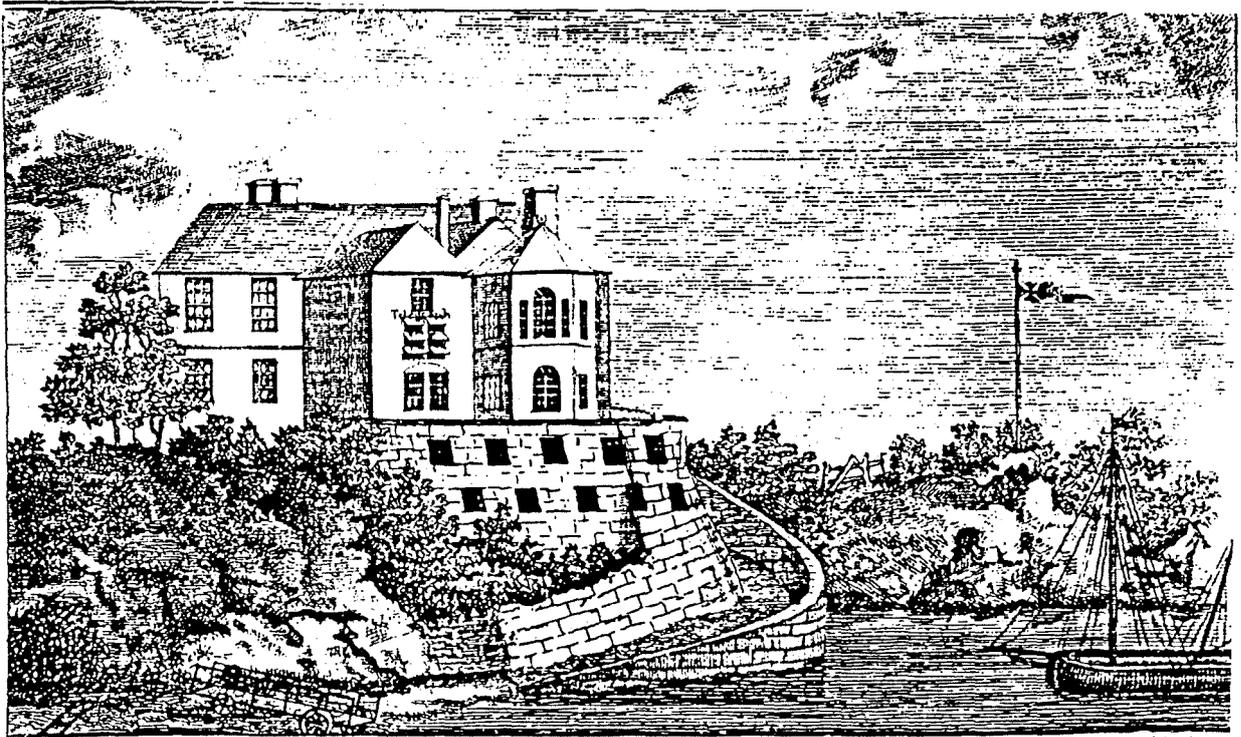
Inevitably, there must have been many occasions when the mailcoach reached New Passage at low tide or with unfavourable wind conditions and delays were unavoidable.

We have already seen that some ferryboats claimed to carry two and four wheel carriages. A 1765 list of 'The Prices of Goods, Cattle and Passengers going over at both Passages' includes, rather surprisingly, a quote of 16/- for a coach with six horses. Normally, a passenger was charged just 4d or 1/- if he took his horse. There is no mention of six horse coaches in the tariff for New Passage in 1826. A 4-wheel carriage was charged 12/-, a foot passenger 9d and his horse 1/-. In view of the claim to be able to handle large vehicles at both passages, a notice that appeared in the Gloucester Journal on 11th May 1767 may be felt to reflect the true difficulty of loading the boats more accurately:

"Samuel Hill at the Old Passage at Beachley, Gloucestershire, begs leave to acquaint the nobility, tradesmen, graziers and others that he has lately erected a moveable bridge, six feet wide with strong rails thereto, in order to be occasionally fixed alongside of the passage boats for the greater safety and more expeditious conveyance of loading all manner of living goods etc and, with which conveyance, horsemen may safely ride on board of the said boats without the least risk or danger."

He adds, in the same notice, the following:

"When any emergency requires, by making a signal with smoke a small boat shall instantly ply from the Beachley shore to Aust side for their speedy conveyance over at any state of the tide when wind and weather will permit."



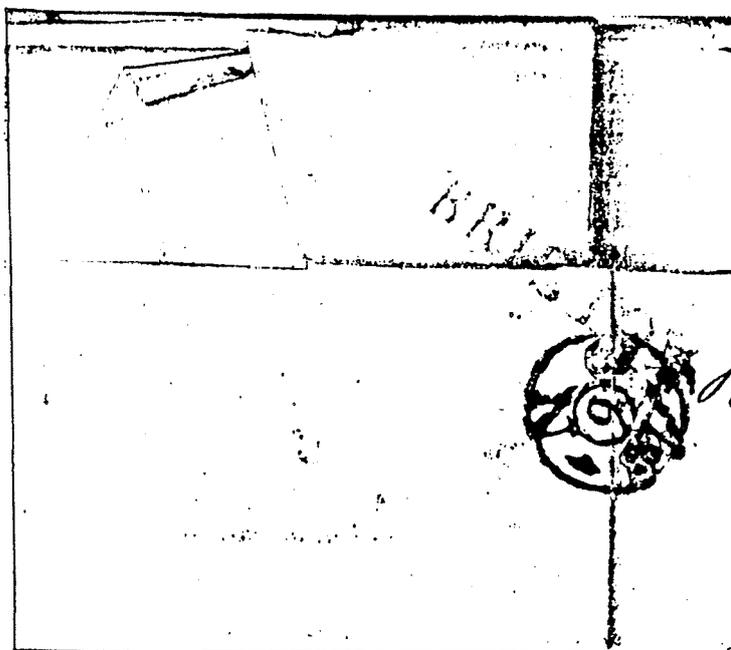
BEACHLEY HOUSE, OLD PASSAGE.

Although this notice pre-dates the mailcoach era by 20 years, it gives some clue to the matter of whether the coaches (in addition to the driver, guard, mailbags and passengers) made the ferry crossing. Because of the need to use small boats to have any reasonable chance of a prompt crossing, it would have been impractical to take mailcoaches across. In fact, it was unnecessary, particularly as these were not 'patent' mailcoaches but stage coaches minimally adapted to carry mail. Such coaches could readily be provided by the contractors at both sides of the passage.

In his journal of January 1793, the surveyor of the South Wales district, Samuel Woodcock, commented on problems with what he called the 'Bristol-Brecon Branch'. Since the Bristol-Milford mailcoach by-passed Chepstow, a rider from Chepstow now had to meet the mailcoach at New Passage daily. His ride continued from Chepstow, through Monmouth and Abergavenny, to Brecon twice weekly and this was the branch the surveyor made reference to - it had been discontinued by 1813. Mr Woodcock commented that the branch had experienced "some interruptions from the Passage" and that, on 22nd of that month, the mail could not get over and was obliged to wait until the next morning. It was probably to facilitate the transfer of bags when delays such as this occurred that the New Passage House on the Monmouth side - the Black Rock Inn - was made an official receiving house.

It was at approximately the same time as Mr Woodcock's journal - in April 1793, in fact - that the destination of the Bristol-Milford mailcoach changed from Hubberstone to a new post office at the town of Milford Haven. An Act of Parliament had been obtained in 1790 by Sir William Hamilton to establish a station for the Waterford Packet. He built quays and docks and the new town of Milford Haven became the port for the packet from 1793 until 1837.

(to be continued)



The reverse side of a letter from Newport (Mon) to London dated 6th November 1787. Shortly after the opening of the Bristol-Milford mailcoach service, probably in June 1787, and for at least twelve months, eastbound letters received a straight line 'BRISTOL' transit mark.

No. 7.

OVERCHARGED LETTERS.

GENERAL POST-OFFICE,

July, 1811.

To all Postmasters,

THE seventh Article of Instructions for Dead, Missent, and Overcharged Letters, directs as follows :

You are to make the proper Allowances upon such Letters as, upon a cursory View of the Contents, appear to be overcharged, provided you are thus satisfied the Demand is just; and be particularly careful in making Rebates upon such as bear an Impression of the Crown Stamp, as in the Margin, and in all cases where the Covers can be spared, you must by all Means require them from the Person claiming an Allowance, and write upon them, in Red Ink, "Single," "Double," &c. (allowed " ") inserting the Sum in Figures; but if the Cover cannot be spared, you are then to alter the Tax of such Letter with Red Ink, and to write on it how much you allow, and obtain the Party's Signature to the printed Receipt for the Money you return.

The above is the correct and proper Rule; but the ascertaining, and the Return of Overcharges, being a delicate Duty to perform, it requires some Attention from the Postmaster to conciliate the Public, while he is taking care of the Revenue under his Protection. When a Letter is overcharged, the Person inconvenienced by the trouble of applying for the Money, by himself or Agent, and having to shew the Letter, is often inclined to feel Dissatisfaction, without making Allowance for the great Haste with which the Business of Post-Offices is performed; the Impossibility of knowing, with Certainty, at the Time it is charged, the Contents of any Letter, and the difficult Task imposed on every Post Officer, by the Law having made two or more Letters, if written only on a Single Sheet, liable to distinct Rates of double or treble Postage. In like Manner a Bill of Exchange, a Bill of Lading, an Invoice, a Merchant's Account, or Law Proceeding, is separately chargeable, though on one Sheet. It follows, that some Letters *must* be overcharged, and some undercharged; but a Postmaster cannot conscientiously do his Duty if he do not satisfy himself by a Sight of the Letter, and its Enclosures, if any, that the Money claimed is lawfully due. This, where any Dissatisfaction on the Part of the Public occurs, should be explained in civil and attentive Language; and if it happen that the Person applying has several Letters overcharged, within any short Period, from the same Place, the Postmaster should report the Facts to me, that whoever is in Fault may be admonished.

FRANCIS FREELING,
Secretary.

THE SURVEYORS' JOURNALS (Part 11)

The start of 1802 found Mr Western in Lancashire from where he returned to Derby by way of the Peacock Inn so that he could report on the state of that office. No sooner had he reached home than he had to go to Stamford to put in a new deputy.

On 15th February, he gave directions for the sending of mail from Barton and Brigg: "at any time between 3 & 9 p.m. as the tide might suit to bring the bag over from Hull to the Mailcoach across the Humber - this is done experimentally and the trial of a fortnight gives reason to conclude that it will be a satisfactory arrangement." On the same day, he set out for Uppingham where he remained for ten days, the deputy there having died.

After he had spent most of March in Lancashire and Yorkshire, Mr Western left home for London, on his way calling at Northampton to rectify "the detention of the road letters between Northampton & Harborough." Whilst in London, he took a few days leave in Bath but on 22nd April he had to take charge of the post office at Tring as the deputy there had died.

The journal for May appears not to have survived. It was not until mid-June that Mr Western had official business in the Midlands - at Buxton where he spent five days arranging for a ride from Manchester. In July, the only time spent in the Midlands was at Newark to "check the taxes and correct the Circulation of Letters passing through that central office." In his report on the riding work he mentioned that at the end of the previous month, the ride from Newark was very late at Nottingham as the rider had got drunk and loitered on the road, for which he had been taken before a magistrate and confined in "The House of Correction" and fined 10/- for carrying a letter illegally. He also reported: "The temporary post put on to accommodate the Company at Buxton answers much better than last year. The arrival now is about 5 pm a full hour earlier than last Autumn which I attribute to the guarding the Mail which has occasioned fitter persons to be employed in riding & more able horses to be used."

At the start of August, Mr Western established armed rides from Gainsborough to Bawtry and Retford. He arrived at Nottingham in the middle of the month as the contractor for the Newark ride had refused to continue without a further increase in pay. He was able to find someone to do it at "the old price" and to convert it into an armed ride.

We next find Mr Western in the Midlands at the start of December when he went to Northampton to inquire about the guarding of the horsepost from there to Higham Ferrers. On his way home, he called at Leicester to "prevent the delay of a whole day on the letters from the South for Mountsorrel."

G.B. POSTAL HISTORY

ALSO: Some Foreign, Ephemera, Post Boxes - etc.

Wants Lists - for specific items or for general interests - will receive my personal attention

JIM HAMMOND

5 Staverton Rd, Daventry
Northants. NN11 4HL.
Tel. Daventry (0327) 71842

The only journey on official business that Mr Saverland made in January 1802 was to Birmingham to inspect the office there and to make inquiries "respecting the Swords & Caps for the Horse Mail Guards." [I have not had time to check but I believe that a decision had been made to arm a number of horseposts following a robbery near Warrington.]

He spent the first week of February at Uttoxeter where the deputy had been arrested for debt and confined in Stafford gaol. Then the question of arming the posts took him to London for a fortnight. The same matter was the reason for his spending a few days in Birmingham in mid-March. Then it was back to London to help prepare the case against the persons charged with robbing the mail near East Grinstead.

After he had attended the trial at Horsham, he returned to London to discuss with Freeling various matters concerning the packets at Holyhead. On his way to that place he spent twelve days instructing a new deputy at Welshpool. He visited a number of offices in North Wales, Shropshire and Staffordshire on his way home where he arrived on 4th May.

The next item of relevance to the Midlands is the visit he made to Daventry on 13th July with the intention of arming the rider, with the night mail, between there and Northampton. He emphasised the importance of this ride, which operated between 8 p.m. and 2 a.m., as it carried letters from the whole of the Liverpool line of road, Birmingham, Shropshire, Worcestershire, parts of Staffordshire and North Wales for Northamptonshire, Leicestershire and Rutland, and vice versa. However, he found that the deputy of Northampton had contracted with a woman at Daventry for the conveyance of the mail until 10th October. She would not allow anyone to ride her horses other than her son, who was described by Mr Saverland as "a youth between 17 & 18 years of age, not fit to be trusted with arms."

He went on to Northampton where he requested the deputy to give the woman notice to quit on 10th October so that "a proper Person might be found to ride with that Mail, capable of being entrusted with arms for its protection." The deputy was also told to send letters for the Liverpool line of road, beyond Lichfield, forward to Coventry instead of Daventry so as to prevent delays at the latter office.

In the August, Mr Saverland went on a tour of inspection in Staffordshire, Cheshire and Shropshire, ending up at Birmingham from where he sent "Lists of the delivery of Birmingham to several offices, which I supposed, upon opening the Bags, were in want of them."

On 11th October, he returned to Daventry on the business of arming the rider to Northampton which took up two days. On his way home, he called at the offices in Southam and Rugby. Towards the end of the month he spent two days in the Coventry office and five days at Birmingham from where he went on to Lichfield on 2nd November. He found there that, despite his letters to Freeling, mail for Wolsley Bridge, and other parts, in the delivery of Lichfield, were continually being missent to Stone. Visits to the offices at Burton and Ashby then followed. As the deputy at Ellesmere was very much in arrears, Mr Saverland was in charge of that office during the latter part of November and early December.

The only journal from 1802, of Mr Woodcock that has survived is that for April. A reason for this paucity of material will be given in the next issue. During a survey of the offices in Hereford, Leominster, Bromyard and Ledbury he discharged a number of the contractors who had done their duty very badly. He also went to Worcester, Stourbridge and Birmingham to regulate the riding work on that branch. He found, during his survey, that many deputies allowed letters, addressed to officers, commanding Districts or otherwise employed on military service, and who were not "privileged persons", to pass free of postage. He cautioned them against this error by means of a circular.

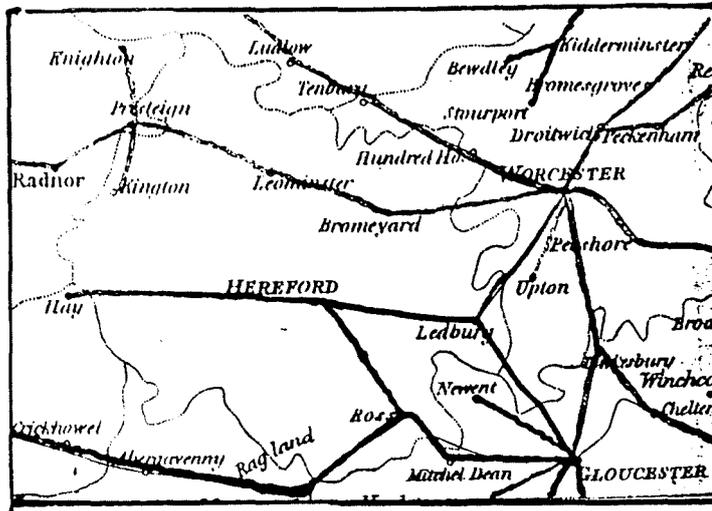
ADDENDUM

In March 1802, Mr Woodcock wrote from Gloucester to Freeling:

"Dear Sir,

The days on which the Hereford Coach, which carries the Mail between that place and Worcester (thro' Ledbury) travels - viz: Monday, Wednesday and Friday up, and Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday down, have made it necessary to alter the days of the Ledbury Post coming up thro' Gloucester. These were originally Wednesday, Friday & Sunday and the return the same days - but two of the Coach days up (which cannot be altered) being the same as the horse post thro' Gloucester (Wednesday and Friday) it has become expedient to alter the up Post thro' Gloucester in order to make the correspondence between London and Ledbury compleat. The arrangement now is: Ledbury to Gloucester - Tuesday and Thursday mornings, and back - Wednesday and Friday afternoons. Sunday remains the same. Without this alteration the inhabitants of Ledbury tho' they might receive letters from London 6 days in the week could return answers but 4 days - certainly a manifest inconvenience, which I thought it right to remedy by the alteration before stated. It perfectly answers the purpose, but has involved the Deputy of Ledbury, who does the ride, being obliged to stay at Gloucester from 12 o'clock noon Tuesday and Thursday, till the afternoon of the following days. He has applied to me for a suitable allowance for waiting so long. And as I am satisfied he has & must incur a considerable extra expense, I take the liberty of submitting his case to the consideration of the Postmaster General, hoping their Lordships will take into view the peculiar circumstances attending it - the length of time he is to maintain his horse and rider at Gloucester on the days I have stated, and allow me to propose that he should have 2/- each Journey or 4/- pr. week in aid of this extra expense, while the same arrangement is continued - to commence (if approved) from 5th January last.

I am Dr Sir ..."

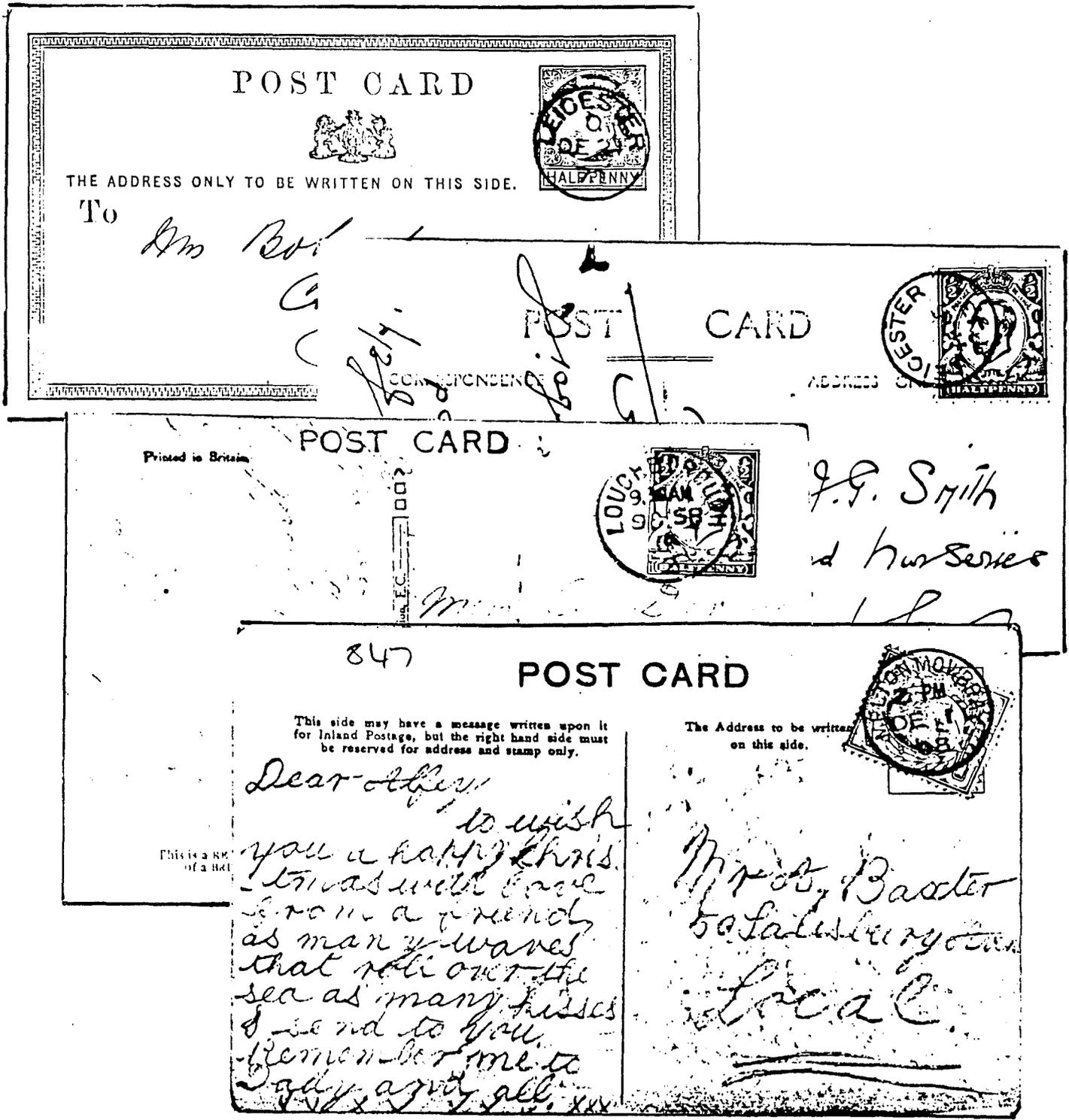


SINGLE CIRCLE DATESTAMPS

Since the Society's resident expert on these marks has deserted them for what appears to be "Free Fronts" from the Cheltenham Penny Post sent at the registered airmail rate from Sutton Coldfield to South America, I felt that it was time some space was devoted to them in this journal.

It is possible that they do not receive the same attention as other types of postmark for they were not intended primarily for the cancellation of mail. Indeed the only examples used widely for that purpose were those issued to the rural sub-offices, and that was only for about twenty years from about 1904. However, examples can be found where they were used at posttowns as a cancellation as shown below.

On the next page are examples taken at random from the Steel Impression Books from 1857 onwards to illustrate some of the different styles that can be found. They are followed by a few examples of what is being used as counter handstamps today.



BIRMINGHAM
T
SP 26
57
2

E
OUNDLE
JU 5
58

MANSFIELD
A
SP 8
58

WHITCHURCH
D
SP 8
58
SALOP

BIRMINGHAM
T
BSP 27
58
1

STONEHOUSE
B
SDE 31
59
CLOS.

STAUNTON-ON-ARRON
C
SDE 31
60

KIDDERMINSTER
G
DE 20
61

STOULDS-CLOS
F
SDE 22
63

SUMMER-LANE
A
MR 26
64
BIRMINGHAM

ALBERT-ST-NOTTINGHAM
A
DE 5
69
T.R.O.

BURTON-ON-TRENT
A
BMY 12
66

SHREWSBURY
M3
JA 28
68

WOLVERHAMPTON
A
JY 11
68
MARKET-PLACE

DERBY
A
SP 24
70
ROSE-HILL

RIPLEY
A
OC 25
71
DERBY

HARTLEBURY
A
MR 11
72

SIX-WAYS
A
AP 4
72
ASTON-NEWTOWN

SHIPSTON-ON-STOUR
A
DE 3
72

BLYTH
A
NOTTS

WHITMORE REAIS
A
JA 15
73
WOLVERHAMPTON

EASTON
A
MR 3
73
NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

CASTLE-FIELDS
A
AU 1
73
SHREWSBURY

BIRMINGHAM & STAFF-ST
C
OC 31
14
NIGHT-UP

BEESTON
C
DE 24
75
NOTTS

LICHFIELD-Road-ASTON
C
DE 28
75
BIRMINGHAM

BULWELL
B
AP 10
77
NOTTINGHAM

EASTWOOD-NOTT
C
NO 14
83
S

NOTTINGHAM
C
JY 31
83
PARCELS-DEPOT

GOLDEN-HILLOCK RD
*
MR 28
84
BIRMINGHAM

EYE
C
NO 21
85
NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

STOCK-EXCHANGE
*
OC 28
98
BIRMINGHAM

BROCKTON
5.PM
JY 27
99
WELLINGTON-SALOP

HIGHTOWN
*
MY 25
08
HEWESFORD.S.O-STAFFS

REDHILL-SOUTH-YARLEY
*
JU 9
09
BIRMINGHAM

WALSALL-ST
*
FE 2
09
WILLENHALL-STAFFS

HIGHAM FERRERS
5PM
SP 19
12
NORTHANTS

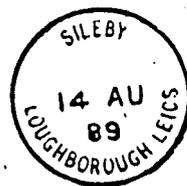
GOOCH-ST-NOTTS
*
JA 4
14
BIRMINGHAM

GAOL SQUARE
*
JU 21
15
STAFFORD

CLIFTON
B
23 JU
21
RUGBY

BECKBURY
B
7 JU
21
SALOP

PUTLEY
3 OC
21
LEDBURY



ACID FREE MOUNTING SHEETS ETC.

As a follow up to the December meeting on repair and conservation, a copy of the 'Papersafe' catalogue was sent out with the last issue. The company is owned and run by one of our members, Graham Moss, who will be happy to discuss your requirements.

THE NEXT MIDLAND MAIL

I hope that this will appear by the middle of August and will contain, in addition to further extracts from the surveyors' journals and more on the crossings of the Severn, an article, which time did not allow me to finish for this issue, that will feature what must be the most common time-bill from the Midlands to be found in Post Office Archives. For the rest all articles should be sent to:

John Soer, 51d Barkham Road, Wokingham, Berkshire RG11 2RG.

G.B. COVERS

Do you see my lists of GB cover material? If you don't and are a member of The Midland (GB) Postal History Society, you should! They contain a wide selection of interesting and unusual items - county material, difficult values and rates- from 1840 to date. Send for a copy of my latest list today. All 'Wants Lists' for specific items or county material will receive my personal attention.

ROGER HUDSON



P.O. Box 172,
COVENTRY CV6 6NF

Phone: 0203 686613