



INFORMATION SHEET NO 8

The Mail Coach Service 1784-1846

1 John Palmer and the introduction of the Mail Coach Service

John Palmer was born in Bath in 1742, and was later in part ownership, with his father, of a new theatre in the town.

"In the early 18th century, players and their playhouses had not recovered from the kill-joy regime of the Commonwealth Government. They still had no protection from the law except under licence, and there were then only three licensed premises—all in London, the Theatre Royal at Drury Lane and Covent Garden, and the Haymarket. Not a single provincial theatre had this privilege, nor could it be gained except by Act of Parliament. It was in pursuance of this end that young Palmer first showed his capacity for getting things done. When still in his early twenties, his father sent him to London to organise the necessary petition. It was not by any means an easy assignment but he carried it through successfully, and in 1768 the patent was granted. The Orchard Street Theatre then became the Theatre Royal, Bath, the first to be licensed in the provinces.

It was a remarkable thing that John Palmer, senior, should have believed his son capable of carrying out such a difficult and important mission, for there had been very strained relations between the two. The boy had set his heart on a commission in the army, had been thwarted, whilst he, in turn, had refused to adopt the career marked out for him which was just the opposite, namely the Church

To the management of the theatre at Bath was added that of another at Bristol, for which, also, a royal patent was successfully procured, and all the famous players of the day appeared on the boards of one or both the Palmer theatres. A thing in connection with this dual management should be mentioned here as possibly having a bearing on the future activities of John Palmer. It was the problem of getting a quick exchange of actors and properties between the two places separated by twelve miles. He solved it by organising a service of rapid travelling post-chaises

(The Mail Coach Men)

Palmer then thought that a similar service could operate for mails, and with this new idea in mind, he disposed of his theatre interests and in 1782 left for London to push his project into operation.

"Palmer based his argument for sending the mails by coach on the slowness of the post-boy: 'The Post at present, instead of being the swiftest is almost the slowest conveyance in the country; and though, from the great improvement of the Roads, other Carriages have proportionately mended their speed, the Post is as slow as ever'. The Bath mail took nearly two days to reach London; the stage coach, seventeen hours The carriage of the mails was not only slow, it was so unsafe that, even the Post Office advised the public to cut banknotes in half and send the halves at different times"

Palmer was sure that by coach the journey between London and Bristol could be done in 16 hours. Two Post Office surveyors of the time, Nathan Draper and George Hodgson, were against Palmer's idea and said it was an "impossibility". William Pitt, however, then Chancellor of the Exchequer, accepted Palmer's suggestions and preparations were made by August 1784.

The experimental trip was to start from the Rummer Tavern*, Bristol, at 4.0 pm on August 2; calling at The Three Tuns † in Bath at 5.20 pm; and reaching the Swan with Two Necks in London at 8.0 the next morning - exactly on schedule. The "impossible" was accomplished.

A subsequent article in the Bath Chronicle dated September 16, 1784, reads:-

"Our Mail Diligence still continues its course with the same steadiness and punctuality; yesterday its coachman and guard made their first appearance in royal livery, and cut a most superior figure.

It is certainly very proper that the Government carriages should be thus distinguished; such a mark of His Majesty's application does the contractors great honour, and it is with much pleasure we see so great a change in the conveyance of our mails, not only in its speed and safety, but in its present respectable appearance, from an old cart and a ragged boy"

William Pitt then authorised extensions of the mail coach service to other roads. By the Spring of 1785, mail coaches from London were servicing Norwich, Liverpool and Leeds; and by the end of the year mail coaches were also serving Dover, Portsmouth, Poole, Exeter, Gloucester, Worcester, Holyhead and Carlisle. In 1786, mail coaches were also using the Great North Road to Edinburgh. The journey between Edinburgh and London, nearly 400 miles, now took but 60 hours as compared with 85 hours at mid-century. The average speed of the coaches was usually 7-8 mph in summer and about 5 in winter.

*This Inn is still standing; but partly hidden by shops and market stalls as it stands in an 'arcade', which was probably the courtyard to the Inn.

†This ancient Inn was demolished in the early 1800's, due to a road widening scheme in the Stall Street area.

Coaches were also serving Dover, Portsmouth, Poole, Exeter, Gloucester, Worcester, Holyhead and Carlisle. In 1786, mail coaches were also using the Great North Road to Edinburgh. The journey between Edinburgh and London, nearly 400 miles, now took but 60 hours as compared with 85 hours at mid-century. The average speed of the coaches was usually 7-8 mph in summer and about 5 in winter.

"After the original mail-coaches had shown some faults in construction, Palmer decided to use exclusively the 'patent coach' of a London builder, John Besant. On Besant's death in 1791 the furnishing of mail-coaches for Great Britain was continued by Besant's partner, John Vidler; his Millbank works, carried on after 1810 by his sons, supplied all the mail-coaches used in Great Britain for over forty years. The coaches were heavy vehicles, weighing some 1,700 pounds, and the strain of daily services was great. Every morning when the coaches reached London they were taken to Vidler's works to be cleaned, oiled, and greased, and returned in the afternoon by Vidler's men to the various inns where they were horsed for their journeys".

Mail coaches never had names, with the exception of one, that between London and Devonport. Commonly known as "The Quicksilver" it was the fastest mail coach, with an average speed of 10 mph.

Apart from London-based coaches, many coaches also travelled between principal post towns (see Appendix A).

"The greatest centre of the mail coaches was London. There were numerous coaching inns, and those in the heart of London were starting-points for famous runs. Noteworthy for their coaching services (in addition to the 'Bull and Mouth' and the 'Swan with Two Necks') were the 'White Horse', Fetter Lane; the 'Bolt-in-Tun', Fleet Street; the 'Belle Sauvage', Ludgate Hill; the 'Saracen's Head', Snow Hill; the 'Cross Keys', Wood Street; and the 'Spread Eagle', Gracechurch Street. Probably the greatest of the coach proprietors were Edmund Sherman of the 'Bull and Mouth' and William Chaplin of the 'Swan with Two Necks'. In 1835, twenty-eight coaches left London every night to carry mails to all parts of the island. Half of these services were horsed at the 'Swan with Two Necks' and eleven at the 'Bull and Mouth'. Such a business required much organisation. At the height of the mail coach era, Chaplin used over seventy coaches and some 1,800 horses were ready at various points to speed them on.

The speeds of the mail coaches on the various routes out of London were reaching 10 miles an hour when Queen Victoria came to the throne. The run to Bath and Bristol was still one of the fastest. The run to Bath and Bristol was still one of the fastest. It left at 8.0 pm and was in Bath at 6.32 and Bristol by 7.45 in ample time for breakfast - 114 miles in less than 12 hours; The famous Quicksilver ran to Devonport at slightly over 10 miles an hour. The coach for Falmouth - 267 miles from London - took 29 hours, including the time for meals. The fastest service to Holyhead was by way of Shrewsbury; in the thirties the 261 miles from London took less than 27 hours - 2 hours faster in 1837 than in 1830. The Manchester service in 1837 was 1 hour and 15 minutes faster than in 1830 - 18 hours for a journey of 187 miles.

Men like Chaplin and Sherman ran famous Stage-coaches as well as the mails. Sherman was the pioneer for fast long-distance stage-coaches, such as the Shrewsbury Wonder and the Manchester Telegraph. Chaplin countered Sherman's Telegraph with his Manchester Defiance. The pride of Mrs Anne Mountain of the 'Saracen's Head' was the Tally-Ho to Birmingham".

(Britain's Post Office)

2 Mail Coach tokens

In around 1797 numerous tokens dedicated to John Palmer were struck. On one side was depicted a mail coach drawn by four horses and the inscription: "To Trade, Expedition and to Property Protection": around the edge of this side of the token ran the legend: "Mail Coach Halfpenny - Payable in London". On the other side was the inscription "To J Palmer this is inscribed as a token of Gratitude for benefits reced. from the establishment of Mail Coaches"; this was followed by the letters "JF", the initials of the issuer. Other known varieties of the 'Mail Coach Halfpenny' bore the letters "AFH"; or the date 1797, in place of the cypher. These tokens, which were legal tender (designed and struck in Birmingham), although believed to have been primarily intended for circulation in London, were probably readily accepted at Inns along the mail coach routes, - so greatly benefited by the improved system of coaching introduced by Palmer.

3 Nightly departure of the Mails from the GPO

For years, one of the sights of London was the departure of the mails from the General Post Office, St Martins-le-Grand, every night at 8.0, except Sunday. In 1835 the coaches leaving London nightly never exceeded 28, and had gradually risen to that number as additional mails had, from time to time, been put on the various roads, either at the suggestion of coach proprietors or that of the Postmaster General.

"The departure from London took place as follows: all mails travelling northward such as:-

The Edinburgh	The Hull
" Glasgow	" Leeds
" Halifax	" Liverpool
" Holyhead	" Manchester

and some others went out at the northern gate of the Post Office yard, opposite the Bull and Mouth; and seven of them, which passed through Barnet, went up Aldersgate Street; but the Edinburgh went down Old Street and out of London through Shoreditch, Tottenham, and on to Waltham Cross.

The mails running south and eastward went out at the gate next Cheapside, and comprised:-

The Dover	The Lynn
" Norwich and Ipswich	" Louth
" Norwich and Newmarket	

and the Brighton and Hastings - both pair-horse mails. With all the above, their loading was complete when the guards got their bags up in the General Post Office yard, and they were then turned away at once; but with the western mails, eleven in number, the arrangements were different. The Guards got off as soon as they could pack all the bags into the carts which conveyed them up to the West End, where the mail coaches had preceded them.

Those for Piccadilly were:-

The Bath	The Gloucester
" Bristol	" Southampton
" Devonport	" Stroud
" Exeter	" Portsmouth

Of these, all but the Portsmouth went through Hounslow, where they diverged, some going on the Staines Road, and others on the Bath - the Portsmouth going through Kingston and Guildford.

The other two Western mails were the Worcester and the Birmingham, via Banbury; but they went from the Gloucester Coffee House, or Green Man and Still in Oxford Street, where the carts carried up their guards with the letter-bags

(The Coaching Age)

4 Annual Procession of the Mails

Even more exciting than the nightly departure of the mails from London was the ceremonial procession of mail coaches held annually on the birthday of the reigning sovereign. The coaches assembled in Lincoln's Inn Fields and created a considerable sensation. Spectators would crowd the streets and thoroughfares of the West End, and residents of houses would be able to see the whole display from balconies or windows from their own houses.

"A printed official programme for the order of the procession was issued by the Earl Lichfield for the 17th May, 1838, he being the Postmaster General. In order to render the procession more imposing, a horseman was placed here and there, and in front of some of the coaches, as appears in the programme (see Appendix B). In other years the honour of leading the procession was given to the Bristol Coach, as representing the oldest established service.

(The Coaching Age)

5 Principal coaching inns in London

Swan with Two Necks, Lad Lane (off Wood Street)

In 1815 mails for Bath, Birmingham (through Dunstable), Bristol, Carlisle (through Woburn), Exeter, Falmouth, Liverpool, Manchester, Norwich and Plymouth started from the Swan with Two Necks. It is thought that this curious name must originally have meant "The Swan with Two Nicks", as the ownership of swans was indicated by nicks on the bill. The emblem for the Inn showed a swan with two necks and two heads; and the Inn was sometimes known also as the 'Wonderful Bird'. By the 1830's the Inn was the centre of operations of William Chaplin. Neither this historic Inn, nor Lad Lane exists today.

Bull and Mouth Inn, Bull and Mouth Street (off St Martin's-le-Grand)

Mails for Aberdeen and Edinburgh, Birmingham (through High Wycombe), Glasgow and Carlisle (through Barnet), Holyhead, Leeds, Ludlow and Worcester, Nottingham, Shrewsbury, and York, left from the Bull and Mouth. The origin of the Inn's unusual name is thought to be Boulogne Mouth. The Bull and Mouth, which had been rebuilt in 1830 and renamed Queens Hotel, was demolished in 1888 to make way for the former Headquarters Building of the Post Office in St Martin's-le-Grand. However, the Inn sign (depicting a bull and a wide open mouth) is held by the Museum of London.

6 Guards and security

For maximum security, a Post Office Guard was provided to travel with the coach, often an ex-soldier who was 'accustomed to the discharge of fire arms'. The Guard was entrusted with a case of letter bags and was responsible for the safe conduct and delivery of them sealed. He also had at hand a sword case, which held a cutlass, a brace of pistols, and a blunderbuss for use if necessary. As the result of a law passed in 1811, a Guard was once fined £5 for using a blunderbuss unnecessarily. The Guard also carried a timepiece (so that he could enter on his time-bill the coach's time of arrival and departure at each stage of the journey) that was kept locked inside a leather pouch. The timepiece could not be tampered with in any way and if the coachmen were running late, they considered it a point of honour to make the time up as they went along. The locked timepiece had to be adjusted for changes of time in different towns, for standard time was not in use until the mid nineteenth century. For example, Bristol's time was twenty minutes behind London's, so the timepiece was adjusted to lose twenty minutes on the 'down' run and gain twenty minutes on the 'up' journey.

The Guard also carried a horn, which he used to warn other road users to keep out of the way of the coach, for the Royal Mail had right of way on the King's Highway. He also blew his horn when approaching a toll-gate, to announce the coach's impending arrival to the toll-gate keeper, so that he could quickly open the gates and let the mail through, without hindering its passage*. The horn was also sounded when approaching Inns to warn the horsekeepers to bring out fresh horses, as these were changed every 10 miles. Sometimes the Guard, sitting alone at the back of the coach, was thrown off by the roughness of the journey and might not be missed until his frantic bugle calls were heard!

*Mail coaches passed free of tolls (except in Scotland where, from 1813, an extra ½d was raised on letters).

The mail coach Guard's coat was of scarlet* with blue lapels, gold braid, and white ruffles. The coat lapels of blue matched the blue of the heavy cloth waistcoat. He wore nankeen breeches and white silk stockings, while the black hat had a splendid gilt band.

As the coach passed through those towns or villages where it was not due to stop, the Guard would throw out to the official Letter Receiver, or Postmaster, the bags of letters for that place; at the same time snatching from him the outgoing bags of mail. Sometimes, these were thrown to the guard from the window of the upper storey of the post office (often the postmaster's own house); or, perhaps, held up to the Guard on hooked poles.

During the memorable snowstorm of February 1831, the Edinburgh mail coach became snowbound at Moffat. The coachman and the Guard mounted the horses and, with the company of two postboys, started across the bleak country to the next stage. The drifts were too deep for the horses, and they were sent back. The two men then set out alone carrying the mail bags. On the following day the bags were found lashed to a post beside the road. The men's bodies were dug out of a snowdrift many days afterwards.

Yet, despite their failure, these two men, James MacGeorge and John Goodfellow, gained a high place on the roll of honour of many men and women who have sacrificed their lives to maintain the watchword of the Royal Mail: that the post must get through.

One of the earliest printed circulars to the mail coach guards, dated August 29, 1792, reads:-

"When any accident happens, write what it was on the time-bill, at the very next Stage, and the next day give a more particular description of it, by Letter to me - how it happened, the cause, what was broke, and what damage done: - mind and do not neglect this".

Thomas Hasker
Superintendent of Mails"

The following were some of the Guards' duties (taken from instructions dated 1815):-

"He had to behave with civility to all passengers, assist the Coachman on any occasions that are consistent with his situation as protector of the Mails, and which do not take him out of sight of the place where they are deposited. He is on no account whatever to give up his station to another person, he is to take care that his Fire Arms are kept in good and clean condition, and that they are always properly loaded and primed, when on duty, and on no account whatever to be wantonly discharging his blunderbuss or pistol as the Carriage is going along the road, or through a town

*As the colour of soldiers' uniforms was scarlet, the need to give a military image probably influenced the choice of that particular colour for the uniform of the mail coach guards as much as the colour's traditional connection with Royalty.

It is a very necessary part of his duty to report the earliest intelligence of all accidents, delays, or obstructions, of inattention or, want of readiness in horsekeepers, of misconduct in any of the parties concerned in the performance of the duty, and of all occurrences whatever that have a tendency to impede the progress of the Mail Coach, or may in any respect be proper to be communicated. He will if a Mail Coach breaks down, describe what part broke on his bill of the next day, or as soon as possible by letter giving information how it happened, and what damage done. If the Mail Coach breaks down on its way to London, and it cannot be repaired in half an hour, or such time that the Mail may arrive at the Post Office by its proper time, the Guard is to ride on with it by horse, or chaise, the Postmasters or Contractors have directions to furnish such a chaise or horse which the Postmaster General will pay for the use of, or the Guard may pay for such Post horses, ostlers and drivers, and send the bills to the Surveyor, and Superintendent of Mails, who will order him to be repaid. If there are any more than two passengers, who are willing to go without luggage, the Guard may bring them, provided they do not impede the expedition of the Mail

Guards are to permit Mail Coach Contractors or Postmasters to examine their Mail Bags, or see their Time Bill. It is a Guards duty to report if horses are unfit for service, if the harness and reins are bad. It is a Guards duty to always have a bag of tools complete, and every week, when they come to receive their wages the Postmaster has orders to examine their Fire Arms to see if they are perfectly clean, barrel, lock, and every part, that they have a Blunderbuss and Case, a pair of pistols and powder horn, Bullet Mould, Screw Driver, Touch Hole Picker and Lock for the Mail Box, likewise a Wrench, Cord and Chain, and Wheel Clips, Shackle Perch Bolt, Drift Pin, Nails, Worms and Screws, and also a double or long spreading Bar, and if they do not produce all and every the above articles, clean, and in the most perfect repair, they will not be paid, the Postmaster will report such negligence to this office

By hand of the Postmaster General,

JAMES * HASKER

Surveyor and Superintendent of Mails".

*This is presumably a misprint in this extract from an article in St Martin's-le-Grand Magazine, vol 25, 1915, as Thomas Hasker was then Superintendent of Mails.

7 Robbery of the Mails

Although danger lay hidden everywhere and the fear of robbery distressed many travellers, with the exception of certain young ladies who found the highwaymen romantic and exciting, there appears to be no evidence in the archives of the Post Office that a highwayman ever held up a mail coach. The mail box may have been robbed while the guard and coachman were helping to put a new team together, or simply through the guard neglecting to lock it. Notices then became frequent stating where the hold-up took place and offering large rewards for information leading to the detection of the felons. In these it is only stated that an attempt had been made to hold

up the mail, never that it had been actually stopped or robbed, though it is known from files of the press that there were several successes for the robbers * and also that on some occasions the guard used his blunderbuss effectively.

8 Passengers and ordeals of travel

At first, the passengers (four in number) were carried inside the coach, but a little later, one 'outside' was allowed to sit on the box seat next to the coachman. This number was afterwards increased to three, a double seat being added behind the coachman. No one was allowed to sit at the back near the guard and mail box. Passengers often had quite a rough time; and, if the coach was going up a steep hill, they would have to get out and walk - to save straining the horses. In the terrible winter in 1799, when it snowed heavily all through January and February, many a traveller going North found himself stuck in a blind white world, with no hope of proceeding any further. His choice lay between freezing to death inside the half buried vehicle or to attempt to fight his way on foot through the shoulder-high drifts to a more convenient shelter.

9 An attack on the Exeter Mail, 1816

On the night of 20th October, 1816, the mail from Exeter to London had left Salisbury and had travelled several miles across Salisbury Plain when the team of horses became nervous and fidgety. Trotting beside the horses was what was thought to be, seen in the darkness, a large calf. As the coachman pulled up at the Pheasant Inn, ** to delivery the mail, what was thought to be the calf, seized one of the horses at the head of the team. The other horses kicked, and became almost uncontrollable, and it was only with great difficulty that the driver prevented the coach from being overturned. As the Guard drew his blunderbuss to shoot the supposed calf, several men, accompanied by a large mastiff, appeared. One of the men, seeing that the Guard was about to fire, pointed a pistol at his head, swearing that he would be shot if the beast was killed. It was not until then, that everyone realised that this 'calf' was an escaped lioness!

The dog was set to attack her, whereupon she left the horse and turned on the dog. He turned and ran, but the lioness caught him and tore him to pieces, carrying his remains under a granary. She was barricaded in and a noose thrown over her neck, and taken away. It is said that the horse fought the great spirit and would probably have beaten his assailant with his fore-feet, but became entangled in his harness while trying to defend himself. The lioness, it seems, attacked the horse in front, springing at his throat with her claws fastened round his neck. The horse "Pomegranate was his name. A 'thief' on the course, and a badtempered brute in the stable, he had worked on the Exeter Mail for some time before this dramatic episode in his career found him, for a time, a home in a menagerie" (The Exeter Road) although fearfully mangled, survived.

*Usually, it was the vulnerable Horse Posts (Post-boys on horseback, or mail carts) which were attacked, for these were not armed until 1801.

**Alternatively known then as the Winterslow Hut. The Pheasant Inn still stands on the A30 road between Stockbridge and Salisbury.

Whilst this extraordinary affair was taking place, the passengers fled from the coach and made a dash for the inn. On reaching the door, it was slammed and bolted, but one poor fellow who was not quick enough, was shut out in the road. The lioness, whilst pursuing the dog, actually brushed against the man. It was only after the lioness was secured that the people inside the inn let the half-fainting man in. He was given refreshments and recovered enough to be able to write an account of the event for the local papers. But, in a few days, he became a raving maniac, and was sent to an asylum at Laverstock. He lived there, incurable, for over 27 years and died in 1843.

10 Accident to the Gloucester - Carmarthen Coach, 1835

On December 19th 1835, the Gloucester - Carmarthen mail coach had an accident, which occurred on the Threacastle to Llandovery mail road. There is a pillar * in memory of the event, and the inscription on the front of the obelisk reads:-

"This Pillar is called Mail Coach Pillar and erected as a caution to mail coach drivers to keep from intoxication, and in memory of the Gloucester and Carmarthen mail coach which was driven by Edward Jenkins on the 19th day of December in the year 1835, who was intoxicated at the time and drove the mail on the wrong side of the road, and going full speed or gallop met a cart and permitted the leader to turn short round to the right hand and went down over the precipice 121 feet, where, at the bottom near the river, it came against an ash tree when the coach was dashed into several pieces.

Col Gwynne of Glan Brian Park, Daniel Jones Esq, of Penyboat, and a person of the name of Edwards were outside and David Lloyd Harries Esq, of Llandovery solicitor and a lad of the name of Kernick were inside passengers by the mail at the time, and John Compton, Guard".

An inscription on the side of the obelisk reads:-

"I have heard say, where there is a will there is a way. One person cannot assist many but many can assist few. As this Pillar will show, which was suggested by J Bull, Inspector of mail coaches, with the aid of Thirteen Pounds, Sixteen Shillings and Six Pence, received by him from forty-one subscribers in the year 1841.

The work of this pillar was executed by John Jones, marble and stone mason, Llanddarog, near Carmarthen".

*This pillar, which had fallen into decay, was restored in 1930. After a while the inscription once again deteriorated over the years, and, in 1966, although it was not the responsibility of the Post Office, the Directorate decided to pay for the restoration because of its historic interest. The railings that surrounded the pillar have been replaced by brickwork and the inscription repainted.

11 Broadcast of news by Mail Coaches

"But the mail coach at the beginning of the present century did something more than carry mails and passengers. It was the great disseminator of news. In times of excitement men would stand waiting along the mail roads and learn the latest intelligence as shouted to them from the tops of the coaches. It may well be believed that this mode of communication did not tend to either accuracy or completeness of statement. We cannot, therefore, be surprised that on important occasions on which false or inexact intelligence might lead to mischief recourse should have been had to the expedient of printing hand-bills, and sending them to the postmasters with instructions to distribute them in their respective towns"

The following is an example of the type of hand-bill used:-

LONDON, February 10, 1817

"The statement in the morning papers that several persons have been arrested by warrants from the Secretary of State is true.

The meeting was held this morning at Spa Fields; but the arrests which have taken place and the precautions adopted by Government caused everything to end peaceably and the town is perfectly quiet".

12 The Queen's sea water, circa 1793

As well as carrying mails and passengers, one mail coach also carried a bottle of sea-water for the Queen, brought for her from Weymouth. Normally, it would be delivered to Buckingham House, but if Her Majesty was not in town, the bottle would be delivered to the Gloucester Coffee House, with instructions tied round the neck of the bottle for it to be sent directly to Windsor. Each Exeter Guard had the following orders:-

"Leave the water bottle every Friday, Saturday and Monday at Staines, and every Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday bring it to London, if not ordered to the contrary"

(Post 10/24 Hasker's Reports).

13 The end of the coaching era

The development of railways brought the coaching era to a close. The first mail carried by railway was that between Liverpool and Manchester on 11th November, 1830. Other railways gradually developed, and by the early 1840's many of the London - based mail coaches were being withdrawn from the service.

The final journey of the Louth-London mail coach took place in December, 1845. Starting from London in traditional style the coach duly delivered its mails to Louth and from there started back on its final stage by road to Peterborough, carrying the London mail. At Peterborough, the horses were unharnessed for the last time and led away. The coach itself was loaded bodily into a flat truck for the first part of its journey by rail, via the newly opened branch line to Blisworth, still carrying its mails and accompanied by the Post Office Guard.

The last regular London - based mail coach service was the London and Norwich, via Newmarket. Its contractors were given notice to quit as from 3rd April 1846.

For those who preferred the sound of the Mail Guard's horn to the deafening blast of a train's engine:-

"Them as 'ave seen coaches afore rails came into fashion 'ave seen something worth remberin'! Them was 'appy days for old England, afore reform and rails turned everthing upside down, and men rode, as nature intended they should, on pikes [turnpikes], with coaches and smart active cattle and not by machine like bags of cotton and hardware".

A Coachman

References:-

Post Office Archives: Post 10

"The Mail Coach Men of the late 18th Century" by Edmund Vale (Cassell, 1960)

"Britain's Post Office by Howard Robinson (Oxford University Press 1953)

"The Coaching Age" by S Harris (R Bently and Son, 1885)

Post Office Archives

March 1989

SPECIAL NOTE: On any reproduction of this summary, an acknowledgement should be made on the lines of "Reproduced by courtesy of Post Office Archives".

MAIL COACH SERVICES c1814

First Class Mail Coaches

Services established

London - Dover	31	10	1785
" - Brighton	5	4	1810
" - Portsmouth	8	8	1785
" - Pool	8	8	1785
" - Exeter (by Sarum)	24	10	1785
" - " (by Bath)	7	11	1785
" - Bristol	2	8	1784
" - Gloucester	22	8	1785
" - Worcester	29	8	1785
" - Holyhead (by Salop)	5	9	1808
" - " (by Chester)	10	10	1785
" - Liverpool	25	3	1785
" - Carlisle (by Manchester)	10	10	1785
" - Leeds	25	3	1785
" - Carlisle (by Ferrybridge)	10	10	1785
" - Edinburgh			1786
" - Norwich (by Newmarket)	28	3	1785
" - " (by Ipswich)	25	3	1785
Glasgow - Carlisle	not	known	
Bristol-Birmingham	"	"	
Liverpool-York	"	"	
Aberdeen-Edinburgh	1	8	1798
Plymouth-Exeter	5	4	1800

Second Class Mail Coaches

Milford-Carmarthen	24	10	1785
Carmarthen-Bristol	24	10	1785
Carmarthen-Gloster (sic)	5	4	1797
Falmouth-Plymouth	1	5	1807
Manchester-Birmingham	10	10	1800
Preston-Manchester	19	8	1807
Calisle-Liverpool	19	8	1807
Manchester-Sheffield	5	7	1808
Glasgow-Ayr	not	known	
Edinburgh (by Whitburn)-Glasgow	4	6	1805
Edinburgh (by Kilsyth)-Glasgow	16	4	1810
Edinburgh-Carlisle	14	8	1807
Carlisle-Newcastle	19	8	1807
Edinburgh-Dumfries	5	4	1806
Hull-York	not	known	
Portpatrick-Carlisle	1	9	1807
Inverness-Aberdeen	5	4	1811
Falmouth-Exeter	5	7	1799
Scarborough-York	not	known	
Banton-Stilton	5	4	1801
Sheffield-Birmingham	5	4	1801
South Shields-York	5	4	1807
Chester-Manchester	5	10	1809
Exeter (by Shaston) - Sarum	16	10	1809
Liverpool-Preston	5	8	1810
Glasgow-Greenock	5	4	1806
Edinburgh-Stirling	1	8	1807

Third Class Mail Coaches

Service established

Portsmouth-Chichester	not known
Lymington-Southampton	" "
Bristol-Oxford	" "
Ludlow-Worcester	" "
Whitby-York	10 10 1795
Wisbech-Ware	not known
Hereford-Worcester	11 3 1794
Weymouth-Dorchester	10 10 1794
Doncaster-Sheffield	5 4 1801
Nottingham-Derby	5 4 1801
Hereford-Gloucester	5 7 1802
Gosport-Alton	6 3 1803
Harwich-Colchester	5 7 1802
Yarmouth-Ipswich	not known
Brecon-Hereford	13 5 1807
Boston-Stilton	5 7 1807
Colchester-Thorp	20 2 1810
Warwick-Coventry	29 8 1810
Coventry-Leicester	29 10 1810
Margate-Canterbury	(not known)
Birmingham-London	25 5 1812
Exeter-London (foreign)	(not known)
Harwich "	

Fourth Class Mail Coaches (dates of establishment not known)

Edinburgh - Dalkeith
" - Musselburgh
Shrewsbury - Aberystwith
Chester - Woodside Ferry
Basingstoke - Southampton
Ormskirk - Liverpool
Newmarket - Huntingdon
Plymouth - Tavistock
Birmingham - Walsall

ORDER OF THE PROCESSION
OF
HER MAJESTY'S MAIL COACHES
17 MAY 1838

Two Horsemen

Liverpool	-	-	-	Chaplin	-	Swan with Two Necks
Manchester	-	-	-	"	-	" " " "

A Horseman

Bristol	-	-	-	Chaplin	-	" " " "
Devonport	-	-	-	"	-	" " " "

A Horseman

Halifax	-	-	-	Chaplin	-	" " " "
Holyhead	-	-	-	"	-	" " " "

A Horseman

Portsmouth	-	-	-	Chaplin	-	" " " "
Stroud	-	-	-	"	-	" " " "

A Horseman

Edinburgh	-	-	-	Sherman	-	Bull and Mouth
Exeter	-	-	-	"	-	" " "

A Horseman

Glasgow	-	-	-	Sherman	-	Bull and Mouth
Leeds	-	-	-	"	-	" " "
Worcester	-	-	-	"	-	" " "

Bath	-	-	-	Chaplin	-	Spread Eagle, Gracechurch Street
Hull	-	-	-	"	-	" " "

A Horseman

Norwich, by Ipswich	-			Chaplin	-	Spread Eagle, Gracechurch Street
---------------------	---	--	--	---------	---	-------------------------------------

A Horseman

Lynn and Wells	-	-		Fagg	-	Bell and Crown
Poole, by Southampton	-			"	-	" " "

A Horseman

Dover	-	-	-	Horne	-	Golden Cross, Charing Cross
Gloucester	-	-	-	"	-	" " "

A Horseman

Hastings - - - - Gray - Bolt in Tun,
Fleet Street
Louth, by Boston - - Mountain - Saracen' Head,
Snow Hill

A Horseman

Birmingham - - - Hearn - King's Arms,
Snow Hill
Brighton - - - - Gilbert - Blossoms Inn,
Lawrence Lane

A Horseman

Norwich, by Newmarket- Nelson - Bull Inn, Aldgate

The above coaches will assemble in Lincoln's Inn Fields, and proceed [here follows the route at the West End], returning to St Martin's-le-Grand into the North Gate of the Post Office Yard.

GEORGE LOUIS
Surveyor and Superintendent"