

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 87, October 1994

NEW MEMBERS

We welcome Bryan Jones whose postal history interests are Stratford-on-Avon and South Warwickshire, and Ian Baker who collects Birmingham postal history.

CHANGE OF PROGRAMME

The date of the meeting at Shrewsbury has been altered to 1st April 1995 from 8th April. Would you please amend your programmes accordingly.

FORTHCOMING MEETINGS

Our next meeting will be held on 5th November at Carrs Lane Church Centre, when members are asked to bring nine sheets on the theme "Time goes by" or some other subject of their choice. The meeting will commence at 1.30 p.m.

Our annual get-together at the Bass Museum, Burton-on-Trent will take place on 17th December. Members are invited to gather from 10.30 a.m. and to bring along static displays. Lunch will be at 12.45 p.m. and is expected to cost about £8. If you wish to join us for lunch please let Richard Farman (tel. 0283-566515) know by 10th December. In the afternoon, beginning at 2 p.m., Bob Swarbrick will give a display on 'The Royal Marines'

The meeting on 14th January 1995, starting at 1.30 p.m., will be at Carrs Lane, Birmingham. Members are asked to bring nine sheets on the theme 'A Winter's Tale'. There will be a committee meeting at 12.30 p.m.

AWARDS FOR THE 'LOCAL POSTS' BOOK

The Society's most recent publication, 'The Local Posts of the Midland Counties to 1840', has received valued recognition. At the 18th Annual Philatelic Literature Fair held at the Cardinal Spellman Philatelic Museum, Massachusetts, USA, the book received a Silver Award. At the recent Autumn Stampex in London, it was awarded a Small Silver Gilt medal and was commended as a "comprehensive, cooperative, original work". All members are to be congratulated on the contribution they made to these welcome successes. JWC

CONGRATULATIONS

Elizabeth Lewis was recently awarded the Arthur Dunley Cup by the Birmingham Philatelic Society for the research she did in helping Eric prepare the Birmingham chapter of the local post book. It is only occasionally awarded, the last time being in 1988 to Stanley Cohen for his squared circle publication.

THE FOURTH EDITION OF THE UDC BOOK

In the last issue of 'Midland Mail', an appeal was made for members to report unrecorded UDC usage data in readiness for a new (4th) edition of the Society's UDC book. The Society is also interested to hear of any usage of Oxfordshire UDCs (as this will be a new section of the book) and also of the use of skeleton datestamps at any Midland office between 1830 and 1860 if that office previously used a UDC. A few members have already provided excellent new data but there are others who could still help us. So the deadline of 1st November will be extended to 1st December in the hope that we can have the best possible input. This may be the last practical opportunity to amend the UDC book and you are urged to contact your County Editor or the Co-ordinating Editor if you have anything new to report.

JWC

THE SOCIETY AND THE SEVERN VALLEY RAILWAY

Members who attended the AGM will be aware of the Society's intention to mount occasional displays of appropriate local postal history material in the Severn Valley Railway's Travelling Post Office. Three secure display boards, each holding ten sheets, were beautifully constructed of mahogany by Eric Lewis and were installed in the TPO during August. On Bank Holiday Sunday and Monday, 28th & 29th August, the TPO was positioned at Arley station and John Calladine's display of Stourbridge Postal History became the Society's first contribution to the new venture. The response was excellent and two hundred or more members of the public visited the TPO to see the display and to receive an (inexpert!) explanation of the operation of a railway post office. With views over glorious countryside and a ringside view of the steam locomotives, John rated this a most rewarding weekend in all respects.

The TPO is increasingly to be used as a focus for school visits to the SVR and it is hoped that, with Harold Wilson's expert guidance, the Society will produce a thirty sheet display on the history and development of TPOs which can remain in the vehicle when the frames are not being used for local postal history displays. Such a display will be invaluable for school visits and for special occasions when the TPO is run and operated. It is intended that we shall provide the local postal history displays at busy weekends from May through August but we need volunteers. It can be a thoroughly enjoyable day out, suitable for all the family, and we will even compile a briefing sheet to enable anyone to answer the inevitable questions about the function and operation of a TPO. These displays provide the Society with excellent publicity and are available to a wide audience. Anyone who would be prepared to offer a suitable display or would like further details should contact John who is acting as our liaison member.

The TPO is currently in modern livery but it is planned to repaint it in 1950s style over the winter months. Anyone energetic and living not a million miles from Kidderminster who would enjoy a day rubbing down the old paintwork would also be welcomed with open arms. It may not seem like postal history but think again!

A PRESIDENTIAL CHANGE OF ADDRESS

Our President, Chris Beaver, retires at the end of October and will be moving to a new address: 70, Filance Lane, Penkridge, Stafford ST19 5JT. I am sure all members will join with me in wishing Chris a long and happy retirement. How long will it be before we see the definitive work on mailcoaches in print?

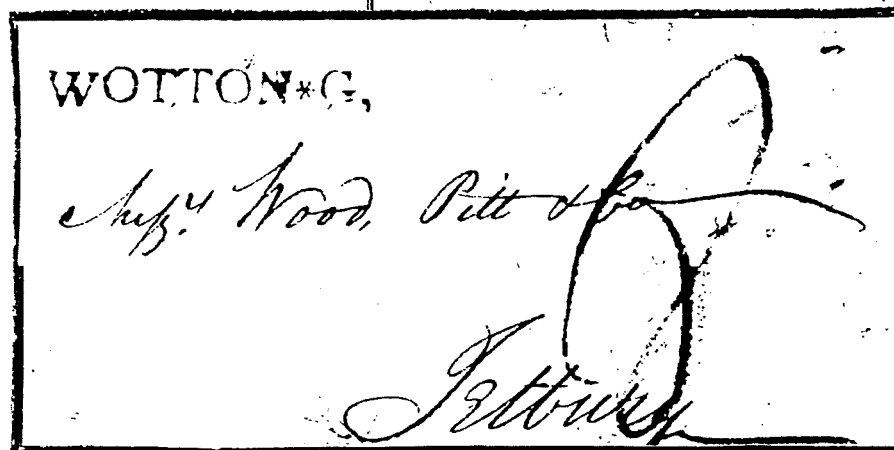
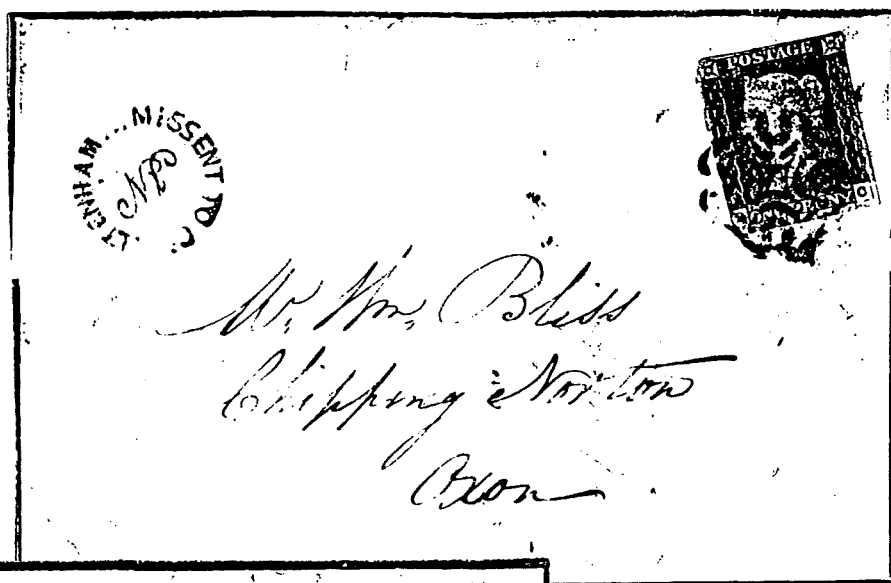
MEMBERS' WANTS

Stuart Hobson is seeking the following Staffs items: 1d Black and/or 2d blue with LEEK maltese cross; Early NEWCASTLE items - ST385, ST389; Missent to Newcastle-u-L; STOKE ON TRENT UDC; TUNSTALL UDC; UTTOXETER/Penny Post. Please reply to Stuart at: The Close, Leek Road, Longsdon, Stoke-on-Trent ST9 9QH

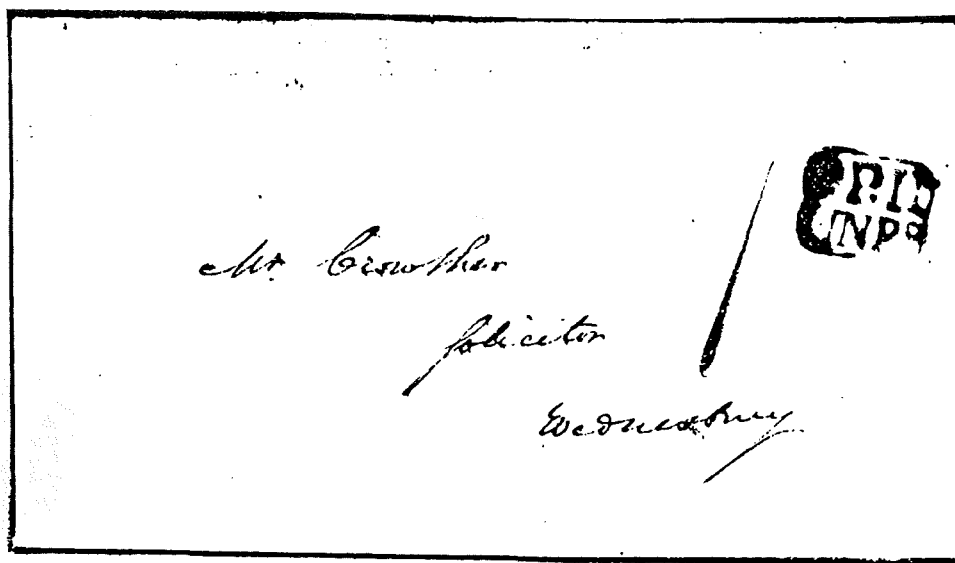
THE SEPTEMBER MEETING

On 17th September, we were the guests of the Somerset & Dorset Postal History Society at Cranham in Gloucestershire. Mike Welch of the S&D began the proceedings with a display on The Railway Letter Post. He started with a cover from March 1891, five weeks after the start of the service, and followed it with an example from the Express Letter Post. He then traced the various rates and rules of the scheme. His final sheet showed appropriately the stamps of the Midland and S&D companies. Harold Wilson maintained the railway theme with a look at the TPOs which travelled through Bristol, beginning with a missent mark of the Rugby and Newcastle TPO - a precursor of the Midland. Other notable items included a Newcastle double circle used as an emergency handstamp after the accident at Ashchurch in 1929; the Plymouth to Bristol Bag Tender seal used on a cover; an example of the Missent to Bristol Station handstamp.

Betty Savage showed material from the village sub-offices of Wimborne. We were treated to a fascinating display of UDCs, Parcel Post labels and postcards showing the various post offices. Material from the southern part of Gloucestershire formed John Calladine's display, starting with a letter of 1630 letter to North Nibley and one of 1711 to Frampton endorsed "by Stroud Bag". John then went on to look at the handstamps of Wotton under Edge - both three line and two line varieties as well as an example of the irregular 'Wotton*G' shown below. He ended with an unusual missent mark of Cheltenham containing the initials of the postmaster 'JN' which is also shown below.



Considerable delight was shown with Ron Hake's display of material from 'Alice through the Pillar Box' which contained items from almost any postal history and philatelic theme one can think of. They were all there - Mulreadies, Chalon Heads, Ship Letters, Wreck Mail - you name it ... Eric Lewis brought us back to the real world with nine sheets devoted to the local and penny posts in the northern parts of Birmingham commencing with a 1650 letter from Hertfordshire addressed to Walsall and endorsed 'leave this letter with Mr George Wyrley in BIRMINGHAM to be sent', thus completing its journey by unofficial local post. Penny Posts displayed dated from 1793, the first year of the Birmingham Penny Post, up to the introduction of uniform penny postage in 1840 and included West Bromwich, Wednesbury, Sutton Coldfield, Castle Bromwich, Tipton and Erdington. Amongst these was the letter shown below which was written at Darlaston and undoubtedly collected and delivered by the Wednesbury receiver whose duties included the Darlaston area.



At this point, it was time to adjourn to the local inn for what proved to be an excellent lunch and a chance to sample one of the products of Hook Norton. Such was the convivial atmosphere that it was rather later than scheduled when we made our way back to the village hall. The session began with a display of meter mail. The first items shown were from the Wilkinson machine used experimentally in 1912. These were followed by examples of meter mail from New Zealand (1920) and Germany (1921). After some early examples of Pitney Bowes machines, including that used by Arthur Wheeler of Leicester as a cancellation, the various styles of meter mark used in this country were shown. Roger Broomfield showed material from Ledbury. This ranged from a letter of 1713, through the early town handstamps, mileage marks, penny posts and skeletons up to a Mulready.

A wide range of missent mail and UDCs were shown by Bill Pipe. The last display of the afternoon, by John Soer, began with penny post and local post material from Leicestershire and ended with examples of the Posted in Advance for Xmas Day marks used at Leicester.

It was a very enjoyable day in a lovely Gloucestershire village, and it is to be hoped that it will be possible to have another such meeting in the autumn of 1996.

THE OCTOBER MEETING

His moving to Scotland has meant that for several years Ian May has not been able to attend our meetings. So those present at the meeting on 8th October were doubly pleased to see Ian who had travelled south to show us some of his postal history of Coventry.

Ian set the scene with a number of early maps of Warwickshire and other road maps which no doubt are essential when he gives a display in Scotland. The first cover, from the Corsini correspondence, was sent from Coventry to London in 1583 and was about dyeing - the main industry in Coventry at that time. A letter of 1653 was followed by one of 1693 sent from London to Atherstone and endorsed 'Coventry bagg'. Later in this part of the display, we were shown other items from the eighteenth century with a similar endorsement but they were sent to Nuneaton. Ian then turned his attention to the early town handstamps some of which were much larger than was usual.

The section devoted to the mileage marks began with a superb example of the first type mileage - '92 COVEN/TRY' used in 1794 and was followed by examples of the boxed mileage handstamp and the circular marks. There were also examples of the mileage marks used, in conjunction with a manuscript endorsement, as missent marks.

The second part of Ian's display consisted of penny post items and village marks. There was a comprehensive display of the numeral handstamps, apart from the No. 5, used at the receiving houses. This was followed by the straight line handstamps of the town receiving offices. Notable amongst the UDCs was the small mark of Withybrook.

A cover from the Uniform Fourpenny Post began the last section. Ian then showed that although initially Coventry used a standard Maltese Cross, by about 1841/2 a distinctive type, peculiar to Coventry, had come into use. A Mulready was followed by examples of the missent mark of Coventry. We were shown a wide range of registered items one of which carried the Hampton in Arden UDC. The 'Too Late' mark of Coventry was used as late as 1883. That was followed by examples of the various styles of duplex and the squared circle. The latter appears to have been used whenever a mark was needed for a special purpose such as on misdirected items. The whole display was rounded off with a first day cover showing the single circle of Paradise, Coventry, West Midlands.

As was shown in the applause at the end, Guy Bridges echoed the thoughts of all present when he said that it had been a display of superb material full of interesting items.



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THE SURVEYORS' JOURNALS (Part 13)

The journal for January 1804 of Mr Saverland has not survived but by the beginning of February he was in London consulting Freeling about the Milford and Waterford packets. He left London for his home at Claybrooke where he spent four days before going to Milford Haven to investigate the delays to the mails which had occurred there. He found that they had been caused by violent gales and not by any neglect on the part of the captains of the packets.

The journal for March is also missing. However, for the first six days of April Mr Saverland was in Liverpool. His only other journey on official business during the month was to give evidence at the assizes in Chester where a person was charged with stealing a letter out of the Nantwich post office. The prisoner was found guilty and sentenced to hang.

At the beginning of May, Mr Saverland went to Hinckley to enquire about a letter said to have been posted at Hull, containing a £10 note, addressed to a Mr Harris of Hinckley and which had not been received. The last two weeks of the month were spent at Burton-on-Trent instructing the new postmaster, Benjamin Baldwin.

Mr Saverland made a tour of offices in Northamptonshire and Buckinghamshire during the latter half of June. On the 19th, he was at Daventry to make a contract with a person to perform the ride to Southam on three days a week, starting on 6th July. That occupied him for the first six days of July. From Southam he went on to Warwick and Coventry to investigate, without success, the loss of a letter, containing bills sent from Towcester to Warwick. Later that month, yet another missing letter demanded his attention. This time it was one, containing a £5 bill and 3/- cash, put into the post office at Hinckley and addressed to Fulham.

The whole of September and much of October were taken up by a tour of inspection through Staffordshire, Shropshire, Cheshire.

There is no Journal for the November but by the beginning of December, he was running the office at Ellesmere as the deputy had been dismissed for being in arrears. Mr Saverland remained in Ellesmere until the 19th when he returned home by way of Shrewsbury, Birmingham and Coventry.

As soon as he had reached Claybrooke, he was told by Freeling that Mr Robert Lawrence had been appointed as postmaster at Shrewsbury so filling the vacancy caused by the resignation of Mr Corbett. Mr Saverland wrote immediately to Mr Lawrence asking him not to lose any time in preparing a new office, and enquiring if one of Mr Corbett's clerks would continue with him for a weeks until other clerks could be trained. The reply was that Mr Corbett was not willing to spare any of his clerks. So, on 1st January 1805, Mr Saverland set off for Shrewsbury, calling on the way at Birmingham from where he took one of Mr Gottwaltz's clerks to help at Shrewsbury.

FOR POSTAL HISTORY
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VISITORS VERY WELCOME BY APPOINTMENT AT BRIDGEFOOT HOUSE
BY THE OLD RIVER BRIDGE AT HUNTINGDON

Mr Western spent much of January 1804 in Lancashire and Yorkshire. The only item of any relevance to the Midlands is that he ordered the Sheffield bag for Manchester to be sent via Derby until there was an improvement in the punctuality of the coach from Sheffield to Leeds.

On 7th February, Mr Western went to Belper and Alfreton to arrange for an "Express" to be sent from the former to the latter when the coach to Chesterfield left Derby before the arrival of the London mail. He then went on to Ollerton and Worksop as the contractor for the rides between those towns had given notice to quit.

Leicester and Melton Mowbray were visited in early March as there was some suspicion that a carrier was taking letters between the two towns. We are not told the result of his enquiries which took up three days. After he had attended to various matters in Lancashire, he set out, on the 22nd, for London. On his way he called at Wellingborough as a consequence of "the late trial at Northampton in which the Security of the Letter box was called in Question and on finding that no alteration had been made I took care to have one made properly secure and not liable to the objections urged against the old Letterbox." [Do any of our Northants members know if there was a report of this incident in the Northampton paper?]

After his stay in London, broken by a few days at Stilton checking the circulation of letters there, Mr Western spent a few days at home before going to Manchester to arrange for people sending letters by the penny post to have the option of paying or not when handing in letters at the receiving offices.

On 13th May, Mr Western went to Loughborough and Leicester to try and prevent the delay of the mailcoach at those places. This matter was to come up again in October and November. He then spent the rest of the month and the first week of June in charge of the Macclesfield office as the deputy had died. Then it was on to Manchester to contract for an express ride to Buxton. From Manchester he travelled to Newark where with some difficulty he persuaded the townspeople to continue to pay their own letter carrier "without any expence to the Revenue." Towards the end of June, he met Mr Bartlett at Thrapstone to examine an application made by Lord Sackville for a post from Huntingdon to Thrapstone.

Most of the next three months was spent in Yorkshire and Lancashire. In his report on the riding work he wrote: "In the night of 16th August the rider from Worksop to Ollerton in returning from Cuckney to Ollerton unfortunately lost a small bag containing 4 letters (none of value) from Cuckney going to Ollerton to be put in the bag from thence. After the most diligent search the bag could not be found. There was 5s/6d in Silver in the bag which money I fear tempted the finder to conceal the whole. Handbills were issued but without effect as the bag has not been heard of."

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

Mr Western's report on the riding work for September contains the following:

"I am sorry to have had occasion again to write to Buxton respecting the late arrival of the post from Bakewell in the morning. Sir John Eden has repeated his complaint that the post does not get in till $\frac{1}{2}$ past eight. It ought to be there by $\frac{1}{2}$ past seven. The post stops all night at Bakewell therefore it may leave in the morning as early as may be necessary. It is not very safe in Winter for the post to go from Bakewell to Buxton over the hills in the Dark. Yet surely, (particularly in Summer) while the company resort thither the post may be at Buxton by soon after seven, and even till the Winter is pretty far advanced, the post ought to be in by eight - it being only 14 miles from Bakewell. I have however as much trouble with this ride as with any in the district."

Towards the end of October, he called at Loughborough "respecting the detention of the Mails there by the time taken up in sorting the letters..." A month later when he went to Leicester "to prevent the detention of the coach which had been so much complained of, removed the sorting the Kegworth, Cavendish bridge & Shardelow bags to Leicester from Loughboro' and established a Short Letter account at Leicester." It is probable that this applied only to letters to and from the south for Kegworth etc.

From 27th November to 2nd January, Mr Western was at the Kidderminster office, first of all running the business and then instructing the new deputy.

His report on the riding work in November contained more complaints about some of the rides in Derbyshire. His exasperation is evident in the following:

"On the 10th November the London & Wirksworth bags for Buxton did not arrive at that office. On enquiry I found they were detained at Bakewell having been inadvertently left in that office. It seems extraordinary that the rider having only 4 bags to take should leave 2 of them behind, and that the other 2, one of which was a large London bag, should be left undiscovered in the Bakewell office."

Mr Woodcock was employed for most of January at the offices in Bath and Bristol investigating a number of cases in which property, chiefly bank notes and cash bills and "supposed to have been sent in letters", had been lost. Despite making thorough enquiries he could find no clues as to the identity of the thieves. [I gain the impression from the journals that the surveyors were not always convinced that the property had ever been posted.]

There is no journal for the February. On 24th March, Mr Woodcock arrived in Hereford to take charge of the office as the deputy had been dismissed. After he had installed the new deputy, he collected evidence "relative to the charge against the late Postmaster, Mr Mason, for not bringing to Account money said to be paid to him for Post Paid letters."

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

Another case of missing property took Mr Woodcock to Stroud for three days towards the end of April. The letter had been sent from Stroud to Manchester and was "said not to be recd by the person to whom it was addressed." From Stroud he went on to Hay where he spent ten days instructing a new deputy. He then spent a week inspecting the offices at Kington, Presteign, Leominster and Ledbury.

For the first three weeks of June, Mr Woodcock was in South Wales. On the 23rd and 24th, he was in Cheltenham, "attending the Office duty - and to ascertain how soon letters can be made ready for delivery at the Window."

A survey was made from 30th June to 5th July on the road from Gloucester through Newnham and Lydney to Chepstow, preparatory to the establishment of a post.

Mr Woodcock attended the assizes in Hereford from 23rd to 27th July for the prosecution of a "Sergt Morris for swearing falsely against Mr Mason the late Deputy of Hereford, and also for forging his name." Morris was found guilty of perjury and forgery but had absconded. Mr Woodcock circulated handbills describing him and offered a reward for his arrest. [I wonder if Mr Mason received any recompense for his loss of office.]

In the first week of August, Mr Woodcock was employed in "arranging and starting the Post between Chepstow, Newnham and Gloucester - fixing a receiving house at Lidney, and instructing the Sub Deputys at Lidney & Newnham." Then at the end of the month, on a survey through Bromyard, Ludlow and Bishops Castle, he instructed a new deputy at the last of those places. A fortnight in September was occupied by the same task at Leominster.

For the rest of the year, all Mr Woodcock's journies on official business took him into South Wales.

ADDENDUM - DAVENTRY TO SOUTHAM

On 1st July 1804, Mr Saverland wrote to Freeling:

"Dear Sir,

I am favoured with your letter of 29th last, enclosing the copy of one from the Revd Sandys, Rector of Southam, to the Postmaster General, on the subject of the Post, to and from that place & Daventry; and I beg to acquaint you that in consequence of the directions, contained in your Letter of the 25th of last Month, I have entered into an agreement with a person at Daventry, for the conveyance of the Mail, three days a week to & from Southam, for £33 a year; & that person has, accordingly, purchased a Horse, & engaged a Rider, in order to perform his part of the agreement with me. I therefore do not see how this Contract is to be broken without giving the man some compensation for his loss & trouble.

What Mr Sandys urges is nothing more than a repetition of what has been said over & over again by others, with the exception that he does not appear to understand the proposed regulation, for the three days ride is to be done from Daventry, & not from Southam, by which a letter will be received much earlier at Southam than it is at present, & seven hours may be allowed to answer it on the day it is received; whereas, at present, a Letter cannot be answered till the day after it is received, and a letter received on a Friday from London cannot be answered till the Sunday following, which, by the proposed regulation may be answered the same day.... And after all that has been said of the importance of the Place & respectability of the Neighbourhood, the Letters do not amount to £100 p.a. If Mr Sandys is to nominate a Postmaster, & to find a Person to undertake the ride daily for £33 p.a. which I do not believe he will be able to do, without the Person is imposed upon as the present Postmaster has been. We shall have the same business to do over again in a short time, for it is impossible that two Horses & a Rider can be maintained for £33 a year. I therefore most earnestly caution you against so gross an

imposition, which must end in a very considerable additional allowance or in the regulation proposed by me.

As the present Deputy gives up the Ride on the 5th instant, I shall proceed to Daventry tomorrow to carry the proposed regulation into effect, or to wait your further instructions...."

On the back of the report the P.M.G. made a comment to the effect that the Southam revenue did not justify a daily post, and that the previous arrangement had done nothing more than take letters every day to Southam without any opportunity of answering them till the following morning. Even for that arrangement the official allowance was inadequate.

BOOK REVIEWS

THE POSTAL HISTORY OF BROMSGROVE & DISTRICT, 1703 - 1994, by Mike Young.

This book of almost 200 pages is a very impressive contribution by our Chairman to the postal history of the Midlands. It is superbly presented with an attractive cover; printed on good quality paper; profusely illustrated with official documents, photographs etc. What I particularly like is the emphasis placed on the sub-offices - the space devoted to them takes up at least half of the book. Postal historians have usually neglected them, by concentrating on the postmarks of the post towns, yet they have played an important part in the development of both towns and countryside.

There are no doubt some people who will buy the book because it contains illustrations of all the known postmarks of the area. Yet there is much more to the book than a list of handstamps. It is almost worth buying the book for the illustrations alone. Also the historical facts are enlivened with a number of anecdotes; I liked the one in the Stoke Works entry about the disconnection of the telephone.

There are a few criticisms I would make. The use of "R.S.O" to denote a rural sub-office may confuse some and is, I feel, unnecessary. Surely BPP/22 is a skeleton and not a rubber; the same may be true of BPP/18 though it is not possible to see how many letters there are in the date. D2 of Dodford is a rubber skeleton. If Leicestershire is a reliable guide they are scarce - I have only three in my collection. However, Mike is to be congratulated on a very good publication which may be obtained from him at:

10, Hinton Fields, Catshill, Bromsgrove B61 9HR at a cost of £9.50 plus p&p.

THE BRITISH POSTAL GUIDE No: 3.

This is a facsimile reprint produced by one of our members, Ray Haffner. No doubt many members will be familiar with the P.O. Guides as they are of use in tracing the opening and closing of offices. However, as the enclosed leaflet shows, there is much more in these volumes than a list of post offices. Do not overlook the first forty-four pages which contain some fascinating pieces of information. A friend of mine, who is not a postal historian, thoroughly enjoyed browsing through my copy. I am sure that it will prove to be a very valuable reference source and will be a useful addition to any postal history library. I do have one query - why was No. 3 chosen and not No. 1? It is available from:

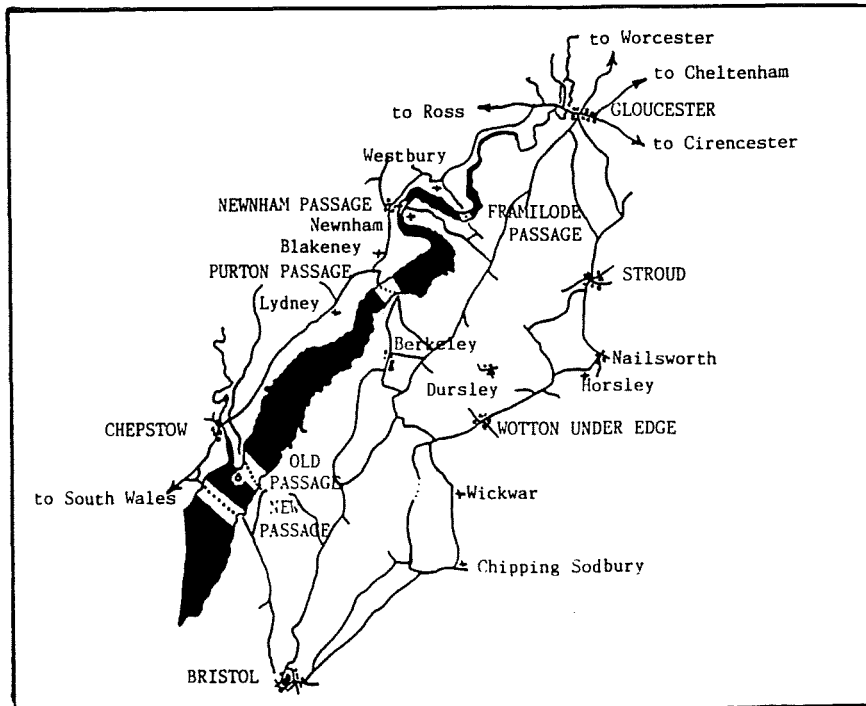
Postings, P.O. Box 1, Oxted Surrey RH8 OFD. £8.50 plus p&p: 90p.

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

by John Calladine

Part 5 - The Role of the Minor Ferries

In all the discussion of Old and New Passages, the other three ferries below Gloucester have been neglected. Their local postal significance (or otherwise) was related to the course and condition of the roads that ran parallel to the river on each side. It will be seen from the map that the Chepstow-Newnham-Gloucester road ran close to the river for the ground is generally higher on that bank. A rail link following a similar line was completed in 1852. Nothing has yet been



said of the road on the east bank of the river - the present A38 - since brief mention of the Great Cross Post which, from the limited available evidence, is believed to have used a more inland route, at least in the earlier years of its existence. When the first Bristol-Gloucester-Birmingham mailcoach was introduced in 1787, it almost certainly used the road parallel to the river. It passes through no towns of any size between Bristol and Gloucester and, although it had been a turnpike since 1726, was described as "infamous" by Samuel Rudder, the historian, when, in 1776, a chaise was seen stuck in the mire and a horse said to have been almost smothered to death in mud. Cotswold stone was too soft for road-making and it was not until harder stone was brought up the Severn from Bristol that the tracks near the river could be improved. The land to the east of the river is low-lying, marshy and, in the 18th and 19th centuries, frequently flooded. It was logical that the principal road should have been built further from the river than that on the west bank. At some points, where the river meandered, villages close to the water were several miles from the Bristol-Gloucester road. Thus the quality of the postal service along the principal roads on each side of the river and the distance of the riverside villages from the road, were the factors that led to the use of the more minor ferries - the passages at Purton, Newnham and Framilode. All the ferries were used to a limited extent by long distance traffic but they principally provided local communication.

Purton, the first crossing above Old Passage, crossed just above Lydney on the west bank and some three miles from Berkeley on the east. Letters from Lydney

had to be sent by a foot or horse post to either Gloucester or Chepstow until the return of a Gloucester-Chepstow mailcoach in 1838 provided an improved service at Newnham. For a time at the end of the 18th century, there was no post between Lydney and Chepstow and, in the early years of the 19th century, none between Lydney and Gloucester. Berkeley probably always enjoyed a better service and was served from Wotton by a foot post and then, in 1811, from Dursley by the first penny post in Gloucestershire. Sending a letter across the ferry from Lydney to Berkeley for onward transmission may well have been an attractive alternative. In 1753, the Gloucester Journal had announced:

"We are assured that the ferry or passage called Pyrton Passage over the River Severn is now as safe and commodious as it hath been known in the memory of man . ."

James Inman, the proprietor, reminded the public of its virtues in 1798:

" . . . the above passage is rendered more commodious and certain by well found boats, able and careful hands, and every attention paid to the speedy conveyance of passengers."

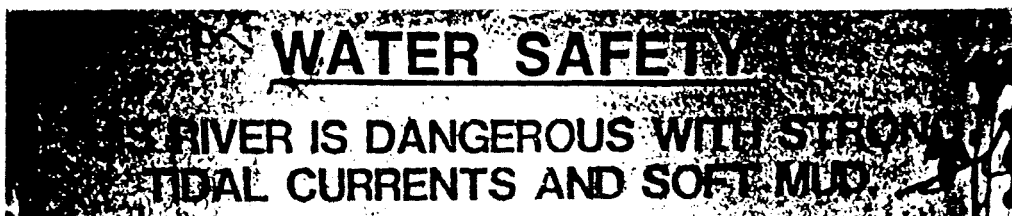
Certainly, the Purton ferry does not appear to feature in the more blood-curdling reports of accidents at the Passages. The difficulty here was in mooring the boats at low tide, as described earlier. The Reverend William Wickenden, who lived at Blakeney in the early years of the 19th century, reported many people drowned on the sands at Purton when they misjudged the tide and he himself once had to run for his life with the Severn bore close on his heels.

Daniel Evans, proprietor of the Newnham Passage, tempted fate when he announced in the Gloucester Journal in 1785 that reports of two men lost on the sands near his ferry were false and malicious. He claimed it to be a well-known truth "that there never was an instance in the memory of the oldest man now living of any person losing his life at the passage or of any accident that ever happened there."

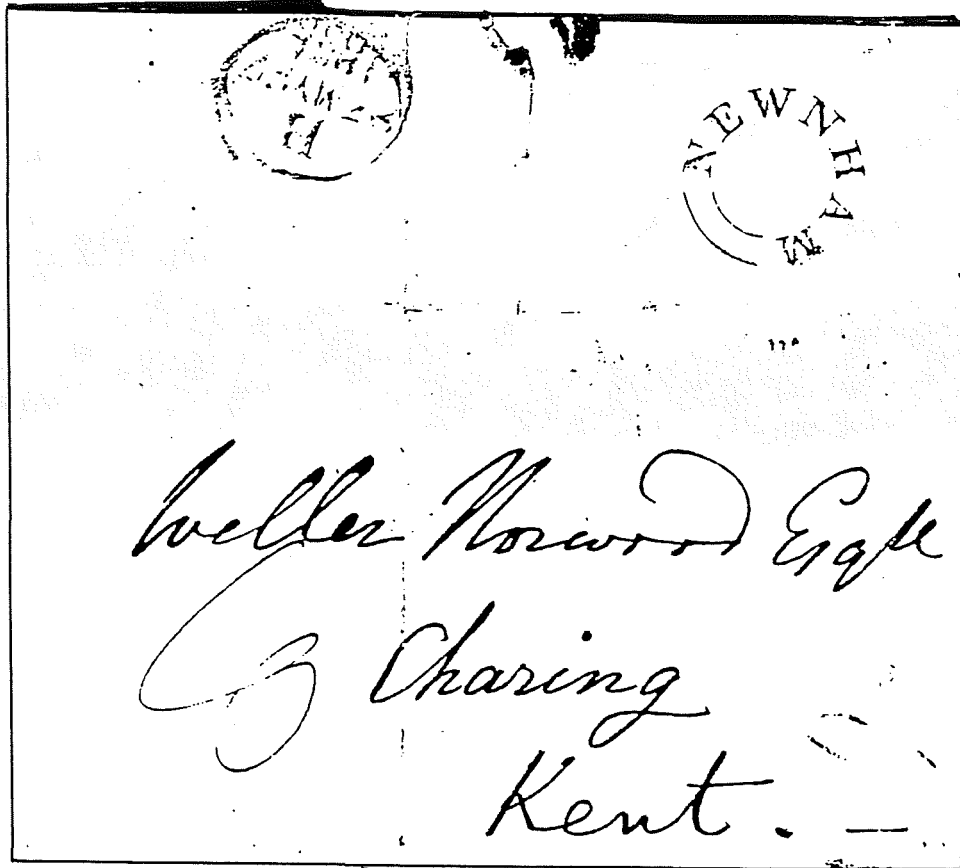
On 6th February 1809, the Journal reported:

"On Thursday morning, between seven and eight o'clock, the passage boat which plies upon the Severn at Newnham was swamped and sunk, when Mr Hewlett of Frampton and the two boatmen were drowned in view of several spectators on both sides of the river who, although they instantly put off in another boat, were not in time to render them any assistance. They had gone over to the opposite shore in a small boat and were returning to Newnham to avoid the flood (tide) when they were unexpectedly overtaken by the bore, or head of the tide, which set in with unparalleled height and rapidity and were suddenly engulfed in the tremendous deluge, whilst piteously imploring assistance from the shore . . . "

So much for the safety record of the Newnham-Arlingham passage! That this ferry had local postal importance is undoubted and, had a remarkable plan to build a tunnel there reached a successful conclusion, it might have become of national importance. The village of Arlingham, on the eastern side of the river, was less than a mile from the ferry but about five miles from Cambridge Inn on the Bristol-Gloucester mailcoach route. With Newnham having good postal links to Gloucester, it would have been easier to send letters from Arlingham across the ferry to Newnham than to take them to Cambridge Inn. Even when a penny post came to Frampton on Severn, it was acknowledged by the surveyor not to have served its purpose well. In fact, because the whole area was so marshy, visitors to the Arlingham area generally preferred to travel to Newnham and make their approach across the river.



The letter illustrated below was sent from Arlingham to Kent in 1835. Newnham became a post town in 1830 and the use of its handstamp confirms that the letter was taken across the ferry to Newnham and posted there, notwithstanding the obvious fact that it would have to re-cross the river at Gloucester to reach London and, ultimately, Kent. When the railway reached Newnham in 1852, the attraction of Newnham to those living in and near Arlingham only increased and it is not surprising to find that a wall letter box was installed by the ferry slipway at Newnham so that letters could be posted by those leaving the ferry. To justify a box, usage must have been considerable.



An old engraving of Newnham Passage.



Evening calm at Framilode.

It was at the crossing nearest to Gloucester, that between Framilode and Rodley that the Post Office made specific proposals for the ferry to be used in a local post. In 1827, the mill owners at Frampton on Severn, Whitminster and Framilode - all on the east bank of the river in the same marshy promontory as Arlingham - sought a better postal service than that provided by an unofficial delivery from Stroud. The surveyor, Mr Rideout, had admitted that the amount and importance of the correspondence demanded very careful consideration of the request but he concluded that "such is the accommodation possessed by the present private post that I do not think the revenue will suffer by not interfering with it". Nevertheless, he made the following suggestion which he believed would help Messrs Porter and Clarke of Framilode Mills:

" . . . these are situated about 2 miles from Frampton, near to the Severn. . . . it occurs to me that Messrs Porter and Clarke might have their letters from Westbury, a village between Gloucester and Newnham, by having a bag of their letters left there by the Newnham horse post. The letters would reach that village about 11am and leave at about 3pm. It is true they would have to send daily across the Severn but I am informed the distance from Framalode (sic) to Westbury, including the Severn, is not above a mile or a mile and a half."

Freeling specifically endorsed this proposal in his submission to the Postmaster General dated 31st October 1827. A glance at a map will show the surveyor's estimate of distance to be wrong. From the landing area at Rodley to Westbury on Severn is at least three miles. There is no record of whether Messrs Porter and Clarke accepted the suggestion.

Part 6 - The Tunnel and the Memories

The attempt to build a road tunnel under the Severn at Newnham must rank as one of the most daring civil engineering feats of the early 19th century. The promoters of the scheme had just built a pioneering tramroad tunnel at nearby Bullo Pill - 'pill' meaning the mouth of a stream - and now, in 1810, undertook an ambitious plan to tunnel under the River Severn. Their work began on the west bank in a field mid-way between Newnham Church and Bullo Pill. The tunnel was to be 12 feet wide and 13 feet high and, with what must have been the most primitive equipment and with no knowledge of the potential dangers, they began digging. When the Red Lion Inn at Arlingham was put up for sale in January 1812, the notice said:

"This inn lies upon the great road which will communicate with the intended Tunnel under the Severn, which goes on with great rapidity at present and nearly one half completed; from the entrance into which it is distant 1 mile, 16 to Monmouth, 16 to Chepstow, 13 to Ross, 12 to Stroud, 14 to (Minchin)Hampton, 15 to Kingscote and 13 to Newport (Glos) and, when that grand Tunnel is completed, it is presumed that the increase of travelling will render this inn in an eligible situation . . . "

The tunnel would probably have been large enough to accommodate a mailcoach but the question of whether it might have displaced the ferries as a convenient crossing point above Chepstow and below Gloucester never had to be answered. I am greatly indebted to John Hine for the illustration below of a unique postscript that appeared on a letter from Berkeley to London dated 31st October 1812. It reads:

"The Tunnel which is making under the Severn from Newnham to Arlingham is at present full of water and must remain so till a fire engine, which is about to be built, can pump it dry. Then it is expected that the work, hazardous as it is, will be proceeding."

I have the Honor to be, Madam,

Your faithful Loved Son

Wm. Pearce

Berkeley, 31 Oct^r 1812

W. The Tunnel, which is making under the Severn from Newnham to Arlingham, is at present full of water, and must remain so, till a Fire Engine, which is about to be built, can pump it dry; then, it is expected, that the work, hazardous as it is, will be proceeding in

Alas, it was not to be. On 16th November, the Gloucester Journal reported (albeit inaccurately):

"We are sorry to learn that on Friday morning the miners employed in excavating the Tunnel under the River Severn at Newnham discovered a small breach through which water issued. This for a moment they conceived was occasioned by a spring but, the aperture increasing, they were instantly aware of their danger and had barely time to be drawn up before water filled the tunnel. This public-spirited undertaking was completed to the extent of 226 yards . . . "

The claim that the tunnel was nearly one half complete seems wide of the mark but a rough calculation shows that over 100,000 cubic feet of spoil had been removed in two years. That the tunnel failed is not in the least surprising in view of the later experience of building the Severn Railway Tunnel at New Passage. Work here began in 1873 and took nearly 14 years to complete. The workings were nearly drowned out on no fewer than four occasions and leaking water was said to have torn apart brickwork like paper. Once, eighty men were rescued in the nick of time and a large spring gushed out 27,000 gallons of water a minute. A permanent pumping installation was found to be essential which, even today, removes 20 million gallons of water from the tunnel each day. These few facts may help to put the Newnham enterprise in context.



The 'Darrel Arms' at Lower Framilode, named after a local family, is now a private home. The ferry loaded across the road, immediately opposite the (then) inn.

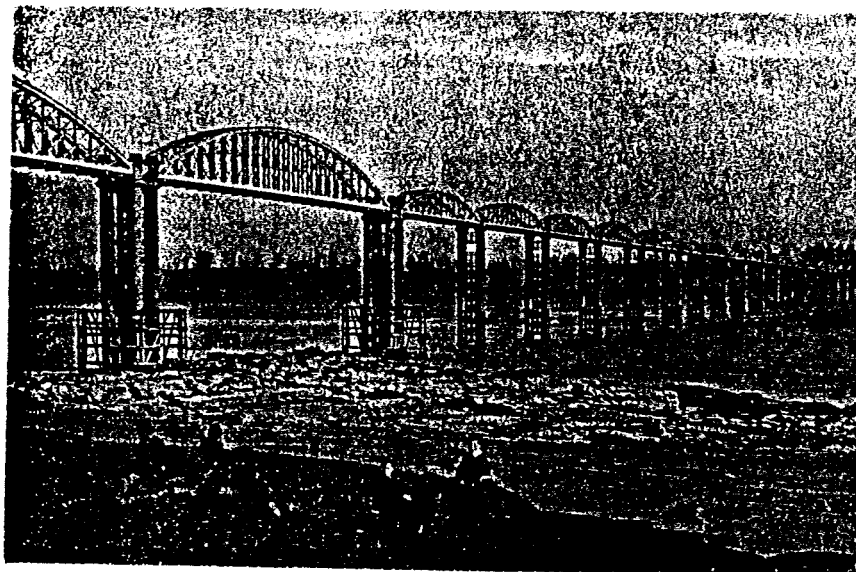
For those interested in seeing what remains of the five ferry crossings, a few final words and photographs. At Rodley and Framilode, the two inns - 'Blue Boys' and 'The Darrel Arms' - are private houses. In front of the old Darrel Arms at Lower Framilode, a sunken boat indicates the ferry loading point. On the other side, the ferry landed more or less where it could but close to Blue Boys. At Upper Framilode, the old Stroudwater Canal reaches the River Severn.

The passage at Newnham retains much of its original appearance. The slipway at the bottom of Passage Lane is clearly visible and, across the river on the Arlingham side, the sometime 'New Inn' (then 'Passage Inn') is being renovated. In Arlingham village, the Red Lion Inn, destined to be the gateway to the great tunnel, remains. Although the west bank between Newnham and Bullo Pill has eroded in the past 200 years, the width of the river at the passage is much as it was in 1850. An excellent booklet on the history of this ferry has been published recently.

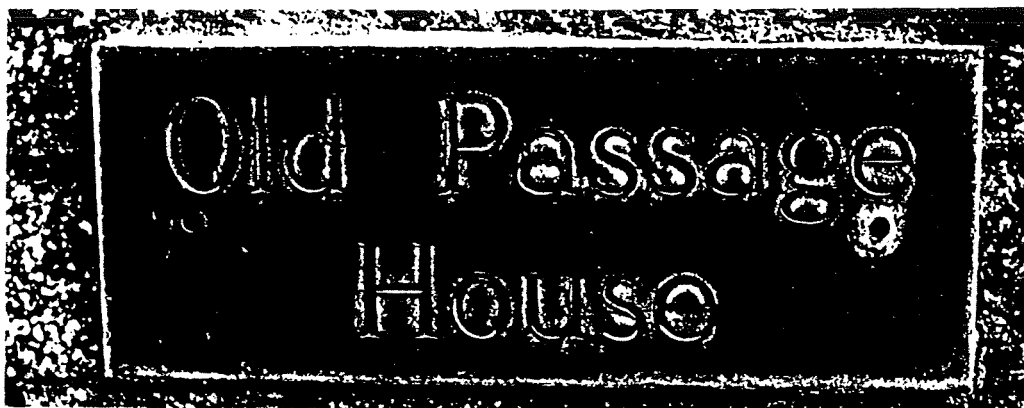


View across the passage at Newnham.

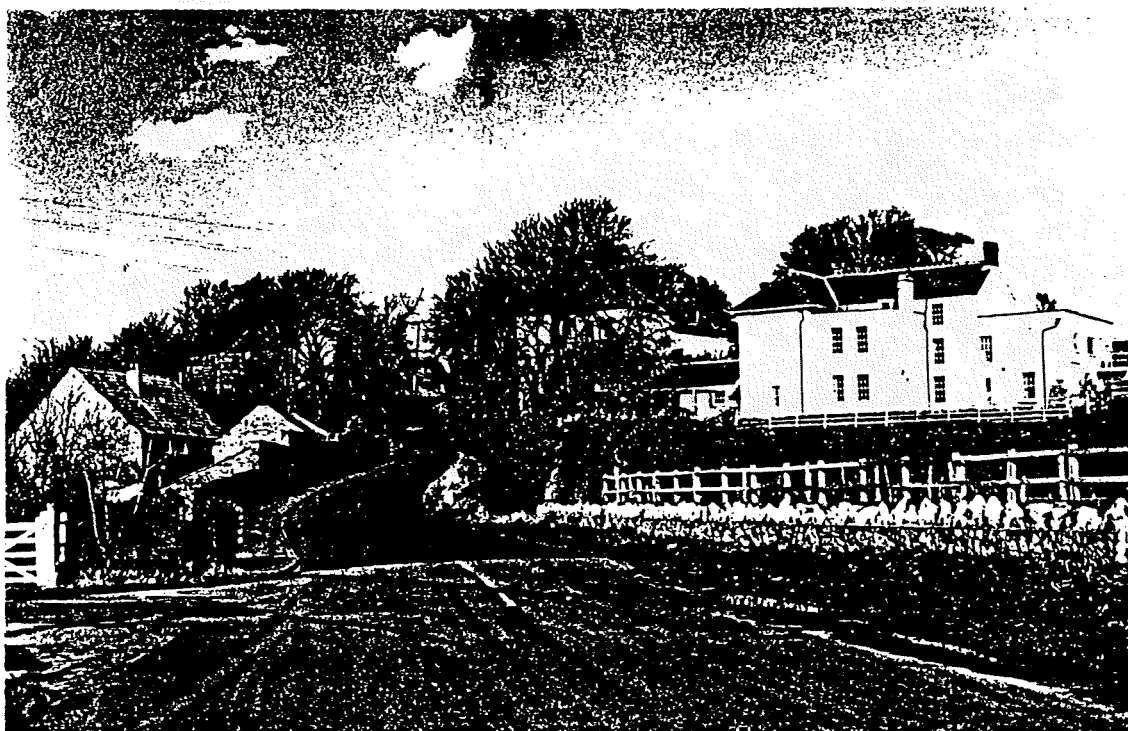
At Purton Passage, there is little to see on the west bank but the old passage house on the east bank, the 'Berkeley Arms', still opens in the evenings. A track beyond it leads to the ferry point. At nearby Sharpness, the railway bridge opened in 1879 remained in use until struck by a small coasting vessel in 1960 and damaged irreparably.



An old photograph of the Severn Bridge Railway's crossing at Sharpness.



Inevitably, postal historians will be more interested in the fate of Old and New Passages. Both retain their names on the Gloucestershire side. At Aust (Old Passage), the buildings would be immediately recognisable to a mailcoach passenger although those near the river have been extensively modernised.

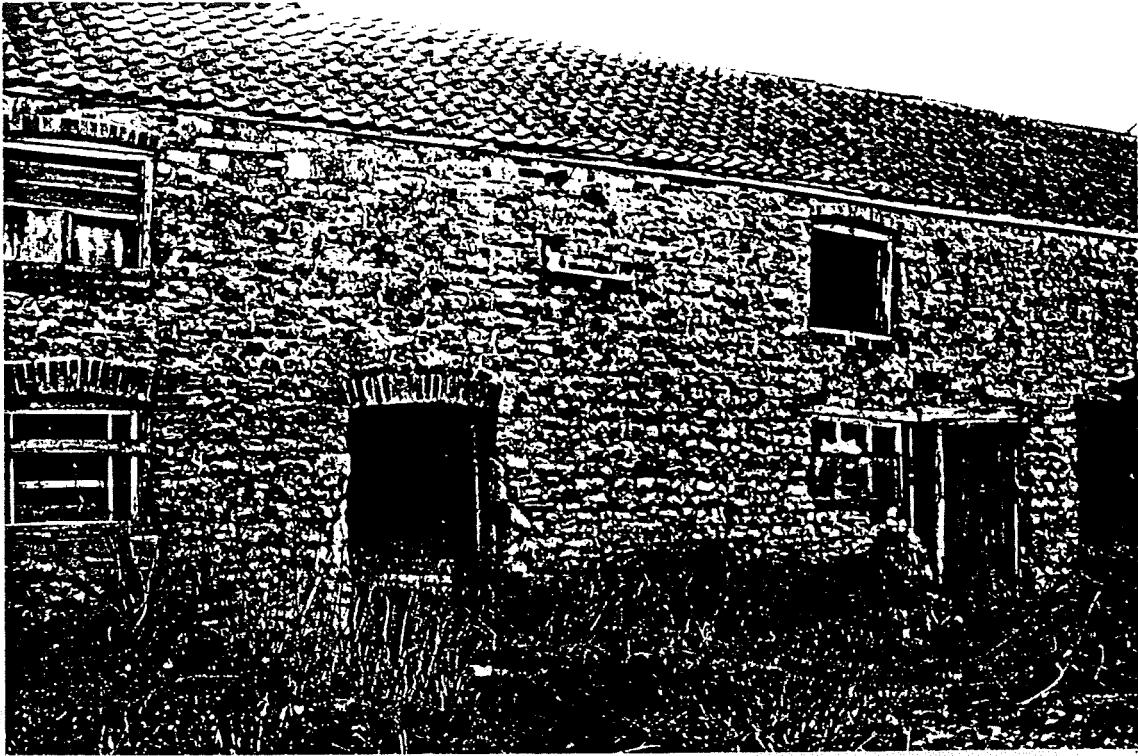


Old Passage, near Aust - compare with the engraving illustrated in Part 4.

At Beachley, on the Chepstow side, the slipway was undoubtedly rebuilt when a car ferry was re-introduced in 1934. However, signs such as that illustrated below can conjure up thoughts of mailcoach days and weather conditions on the Severn Bridge still serve to remind travellers of the hazards faced at the passage.



At New Passage, the Gloucestershire side is disappearing under concrete as the approaches to the new Severn Crossing are constructed. The Passage Inn structure largely remains, albeit empty at the time of writing, but the old buildings that undoubtedly housed horses and coaches appear doomed and may have been photographed



Stables and coach house at New Passage.

for the last time. On the Monmouthshire side of New Passage, a pleasant picnic area now occupies the site of the Black Rock Inn, the ferry terminus, burned down some years ago. The narrow lanes leading to it are a useful reminder of road conditions 200 years ago. Shoals of forbidding rock in the river make it hard to believe that anyone would have chosen to cross at this place. Slipways and quays remain but these are probably relics of the early railway link. On a foggy day, the bridges are invisible and the apparently endless void is truly frightening.

And, finally, what of the great tunnel venture? Sadly, not a sign remains.

* * * * *

Acknowledgments

The help given by colleagues and friends is most gratefully acknowledged. Particular thanks are due to Chris Beaver who provided a mass of unique mailcoach data without which such an article would have been impossible, to John Hine for much indirect help and for copies of local letters that might have used the minor ferries, to Bill Rees of Clevedon for photocopies of the (illustrated) letters that crossed New Passage to and from South Wales and for a great deal of relevant Bristol directory information, to David Cornelius for helpful literature references to Old and New Passages, to Mrs Margaret Willis (author of 'The Ferry between Newnham and Arlingham') and to others, names unknown, encountered on the river bank who provided invaluable local knowledge.

References

A complete list of references is available on request.

A HAPPY CHRISTMAS

It is rather early to be sending Christmas greetings but as the next Midland Mail appears after the festive season, I will take this opportunity of wishing all members a happy Christmas.





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