

# MIDLAND MAIL

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



President: Mr W.J. Calladine

Chairman:  
Mike Young

Treasurer:  
Trevor Clewley

Secretary:  
Elizabeth Lewis

NUMBER 72, OCTOBER 1991

Inadvertently the last issue was printed at twelve characters to the inch rather than ten. I would welcome comments on which members prefer.

I am not sure what to make of the decision of Christies to do away with the postal history auctions in Bournemouth. Is it the recession in the art world making the pruning of staff necessary? Or is there insufficient material to make three or four auctions a year viable? Whatever the cause, I am less than pleased to find, shortly after re-newing my subscription that to obtain the same coverage as before I shall need to subscribe to three catalogues. The fact that our postman almost demolishes the letter box to deliver large glossy catalogues, of expensive (usually American) material, for which I have not asked only serves to compound my irritation. I imagine one of our advertisers may well benefit from this change, though I will refrain from commenting on the Buyer's Premium.

### FORTHCOMING MEETINGS

A joint meeting will be held with the Lancashire & Cheshire and the Shropshire Societies on 2nd November at the Village Hall, Walton, near Stafford. The hall is on the A513 Stafford to Rugeley road. If anyone requires transport from Stafford station they should contact Richard Farman on 0283-66515. The meeting will begin at 10 a.m. for 10.30. Lunch will be available at 12.30 at a cost expected to be about £4. Members are asked to bring a 20 sheet display on which they will talk for a maximum of ten minutes. The afternoon session will last from 2 till 4 p.m.

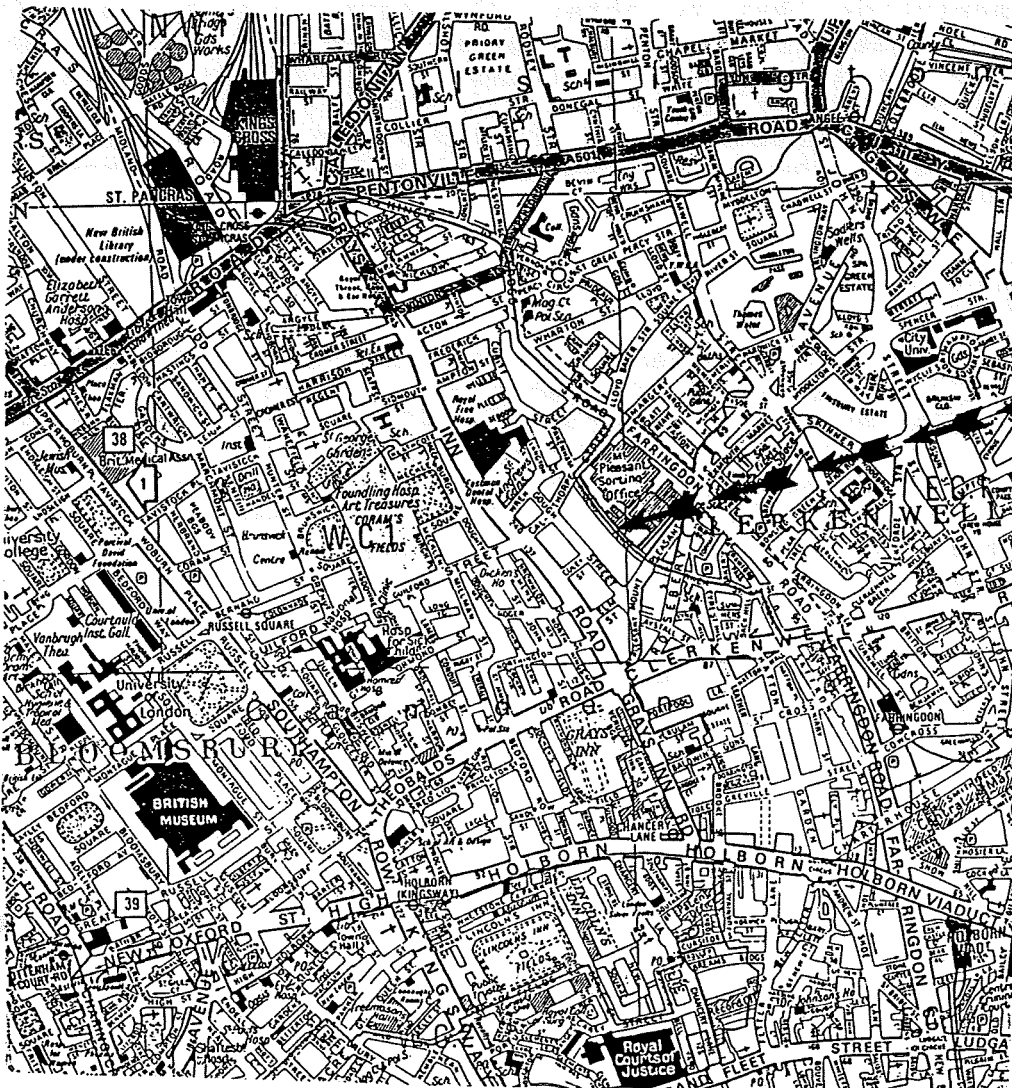
As usual the meeting on 14th December will be held at the Bass, Museum, Burton-on-Trent. The meeting will begin at about 10.30 a.m. with static displays by members. The afternoon session will be devoted to a display of material from the Robson Lowe collection. I believe that Elizabeth Lewis has volunteered to provide the commentary. Lunch will be at 12.30 p.m. The exact cost is not yet known but will be in the region of £6. If you wish to join us for lunch would you please let Richard Farman know by 7th December. There will be a short committee meeting at 12 noon since the January meeting will be a visit to Post Office Archives in London.

# Society visit to Post Office Archives

The Society has been invited to visit the new premises of Post Office Archives on Saturday 18th January. Since 5th November, the archives have been located in Phoenix Place, just off Mount Pleasant and at the rear of the Mount Pleasant Sorting Office. This is about a 15 minute walk from Kings Cross station but Farringdon and Chancery Lane are probably a little nearer. Car parking in the area is not easy but options are being looked at.

Our party will be limited to 15. We will make our own way to London and assemble by 11 a.m. At the moment it is planned that we will take packed lunches but it is just possible that lunch can be arranged. After tours of the new facility in small groups, we shall have the chance to conduct our own research until about 4 p.m.

Our Society was the very first to arrange a special visit to Post Archives in January 1988 and we are delighted to be the first society to tour the new premises. The last visit was an eye-opener for there is so much more to see than the material on the open shelves of the search room. It is an ideal opportunity for anyone who has been reluctant to make a visit on their own to find out just what is there and it will be helpful to those who have to earn a crust during the working week. Anyone wishing to join the visit is requested to send a postcard to John Calladine, Dunley House, Cranham, Gloucester GL4 8HQ or to phone him (after 18th November) on Gloucester (0452) 862218. Prompt application is recommended.



PO ARCHIVES NEW LOCATION

## THE SEPTEMBER MEETING

The subject for the first meeting of the new season was "Recent Acquisitions or Nine Different Sheets". Ted Coles kicked off with nine sheets on precancels - items from firms who were allowed to precancel their own mail. Of particular note were a W.H. Smith & Sons wrapper sent to Java and material from Smith, Elder & Sons. Your editor was given a gentle hint to get on with his draft for the Local Posts Project as items sent to Ashby-de-la-Zouch formed the bulk of Richard Farman's display. There were a number of covers showing the extra ½d charged on delivery there, as well as three letters sent from Staffordshire at different times showing different rates. John Calladine started with an undated 'COVEN/TRY' from before 1713 and a letter, sent from Clifton to Bingham but redirected to Nottingham, which showed one of the dated straight lines of Bingham. He then moved to the southwest producing a 2d blue stationery envelope sent through the Wordesley Penny Post as well as a Coleford traveller used on the very day that the replacement cds was sent from London. Skeletons also featured in Roger Broomfield's display. He had two postcards written on the same day in 1902 by the same person, both cancelled by a Ledbury skeleton. Then we saw a lovely display of old Valentines and Christmas cards belonging to Elizabeth. Whilst some collect "Postal History from the Wastepaper Basket", Eric Lewis collects it from the woodshed for we saw some of the rulers he had rescued from there after he had seen the last Britannia Stamp Bureau catalogue. He also produced a copy of the London Gazette of 1769 with the announcement that the letter carriers were "to go round their respective Walks with their Bells every Night...". Alf Fieldhouse traced the development of the London Bishopmarks as well as showing the handstamps of the various receivers the most notable of which was a 1774 Partington.

Harold Wilson began with two items sent by Wigfalls marked "Return to Sender". We then saw an example of the unrecorded 28 obliterator of Asbourne as well as a number of missent items including one for Ashbourne, Derby sent to Ashbourne, Ireland. Chris Beaver produced nine sheets of oddities. A registered envelope stamped with an 18p adhesive had been endorsed "Found on facer table". Also we saw a letter with an endorsement indicating that it was too late for the local delivery at Lichfield. Then the highlight of the afternoon, a record breaking attempt made by John Soer. Nine sheets containing 93 double circles, which is the equivalent of 186 single circles, easily broke the previous record set Trevor Clewley. Derek Smeathers produced a Higham Ferrers/Penny Post struck in pinkish red, the only known example of the "P1" handstamp of that town and a number of railway items. A "BEWDLEY" handstamp of 1725 and an unrecorded 1838 Dudley Skeleton were amongst the items with which Mike Young rounded off the afternoon.

## 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

THE OCTOBER MEETING

One of our own members, Gordon Hardy, provided the entertainment on 12th October with a display of Derbyshire postal history. Mr Hardy began with some early maps of the county including one of 1677 with a mileage chart. The rate shown on a 1669 letter from Tideswell caused a deal of comment but no firm conclusion seemed to emerge. Then Gordon turned his attention to Chesterfield. Amongst the items we saw were a 1734 "CHESTER/FEILD", a 1738 "CHESTER/FIELD" and a "horseshoe" from about 1790. Buxton was represented by a straight line mark of 1798, a number of mileage marks and a skeleton used in 1910 at a T.A. camp. This was followed by a "CHAPEL LE FRITH" of 1816. Other items of note in this first section were a Mulready sent from Bakewell in June 1841; the italic handstamp of Hathersage; the reversed horseshoe of Stoney Middleton.

Gordon then took a detailed look at the mail routes north of Derby in the area of Belper, Alferton etc. There were two examples from about 1800 of the Peacock Inn handstamp. A "WIRKS/WORTH" of 1790 represented that town in addition to a penny black with the letters "AA" and a 1849 registered letter. In the absence of the Society's Tipton expert, the mark on a letter of 1821 sent from Tipton to Heage was adjudged by the two Worcestershire experts present to be an unrecorded one.

After the tea break, Gordon looked at the local posts, both official and unofficial, of the county in some detail. There were several examples of the boxed No. 2 used in the unofficial posts at Derby as well as that used in the official penny post at Belper. The various types of handstamp used in the Derby Penny Post were also shown.

Finally we came to Derby. A range of handstamps included a 1726 "DERBY", a 1755 "DARBY", the large "DERBY" of 1765/6 and the handstamp with the splayed 'Y' from 1793. Three other items caught your reporters eye. They were: a penny black on cover sent from Derby to Hathersage in August 1840; another penny black cover sent from Leicester to Loughborough endorsed "Missent to Derby"; an 1855 registered sent from Derby with a 6d embossed used to pay the registration fee.

Altogether it was an interesting display of Midlands postal history which is what our Society is all about.

CORRESPONDENCE

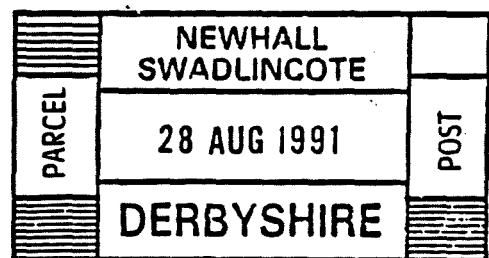
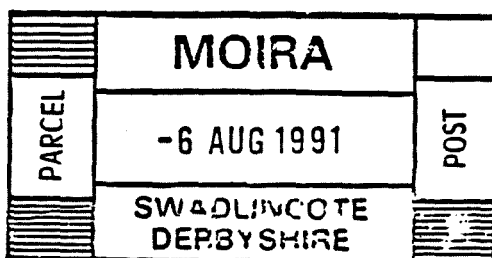
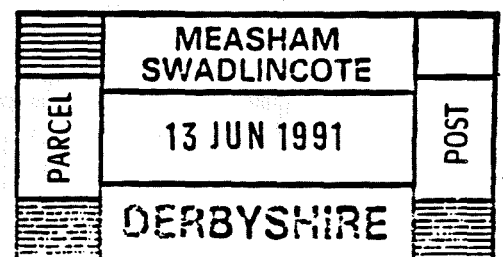
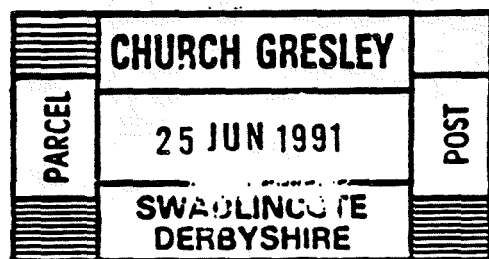
Eric and Elizabeth Lewis have written:

"with reference to the article by Derek Smeathers in MM71, he has probably realised his three covers were used by the Earl to compose drafts of letters he wished to write and not copies of ones already written. Hence the many alterations and crossings out. The 'covers' were then undoubtedly retained as rough copies.

To quote a much more recent example we have in front of us as we write, a letter written in 1967 by Sydney Raine who never seemed to use new paper even for the actual letters he sent. This particular one is written on the back of an old letter, an illustration enclosed with the letter was drawn by Sydney on the back of one of his pension slips and the envelope he used was second-hand. Even the address label pasted on the envelope was written on the back of part of an old letter."

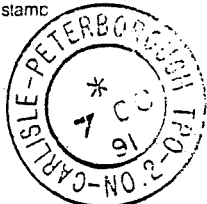
SWADLINCOTE

As promised earlier this year the various datestamps of most of the sub-offices of Swadlincote are shown below. Note that Moira Road, Donisthorpe has 'moved' into Swadlincote. It remains to be seen if the datestamp is replaced. Woodville was still using its old parcel post handstamp when the strike of the c.d.s. was obtained. My thanks are due to Harold Wilson for obtaining the majority of these impressions.



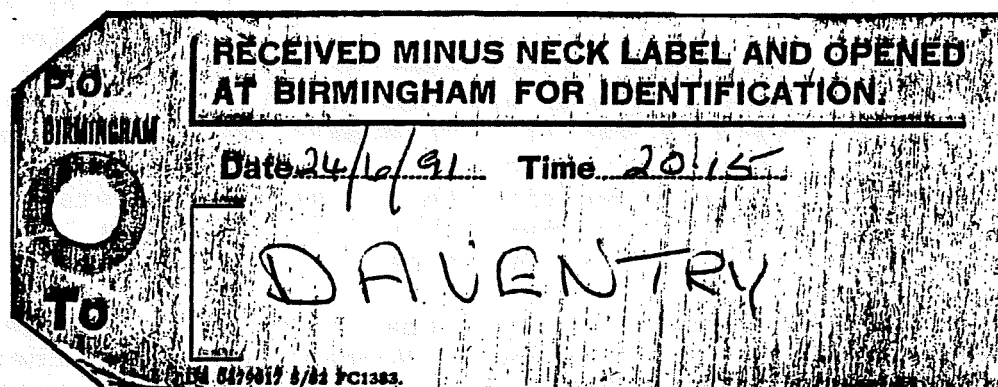
TPO NETWORK

OCT 1981 SHAWO 5460-2883  
071-250-2883

|                                      |                                                                                     |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| To (and authorised time of despatch) | Despatching Office<br>Date stamp                                                    |
| CE PETERBORO TPO<br>TO 01:12 / MSUX  |  |

### AN UNUSUAL MAILBAG LABEL

David Hardwick has also kindly supplied the copy of the mailbag label shown below.



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EACH OFFICE IN YOUR DISTRICT WITH ITS MILEAGE

by Rev Christopher Beaver

When a Select Committee of Parliament asks for yet another return, you groan, you wonder what they're after - and you feel obliged to supply the information you suppose is wanted.

What a bind. They're asking for a list of every post town, sub post town, penny post, 5th Clause office, and the distance from London. Well, I can leave out receiving offices in towns, as well as the place where we don't pay a salary. It's not the categories they really want, just the distance. I'll start with the G.P. offices - I do try to keep them up to date and should be able to work out any mileage changes from the time bills and way bills. Hmm, fancy calling an inn a town. How daft can you get?..... Good that was quite easy, except for the spelling - they'll check that in London, no doubt. Now all those off-beat places I've never been back to since I started them. You've got to rely on your memory when they're not even on the map. There's not time to write to every postmaster and ask how far his carriers walk nor to go through all the files to see if I've missed one or two places....Now to put everything in alphabetical order more or less....That should do. Hope the printer can read my writing this time. Those stamp-makers are always making mistakes. Oh goodness, how did I miss out that village - yes, if I think of any more I'll jot them down at the end of my list.

Actually no one surveyor did it that way. Between them they had such thoughts and distractions too. No-one at London checked. The printer just did his best with the seven lists. He even supposed North Wales and South Wales meant that. Only three districts have the offices in four categories as asked for. One has sub post towns among the post towns. Four don't have a 5th Clause list, though if you look elsewhere in the Reports you can discover that some of the supposedly Penny Posts in two of the districts aren't Penny Posts at all. In one district there are "sub post offices" but no "sub post towns" it seems, which does actually make sense because they are the same thing - they are places run by sub-deputies and where General Post rates apply, many of them ludicrously called towns.

Why the Committee wanted to know the actual distance of every little office from London is hard to imagine. That the question had not been asked before is evident from the rough and ready answers arrived at for some of the Penny Post offices. Some look like guesses. A couple of offices occur on two surveyors' lists and you can take your pick - Thornbury is 133 or 134, and Cross Hands 108 or 109 - not of course the same Cross Hands which is also on one of the lists as 131.

There are places which defy easy categorization; two offices on one list of sub post towns are noted as also being penny posts. Perhaps other districts actually had similar oddities that are not pointed out. Some surveyors were more careful than others. You will search in vain for some names you know should be listed. There are ten such omissions of Staffordshire offices, for example, and no logic about which of Birmingham's many are in or out. Who would miss Brierly Hill and Tipton?

The whole return was printed as Appendix(E) No. 25 in the Second Report of the Select Committee on Postage, of 1838. My judgement is the surveyors prepared their responses to this particular query towards

the end of the previous year. I have found no offices that certainly opened in the year of the Report are included, whereas those opened or altered or altered in status or mileage during 1837 do seem to be correct including some November changes. The extracts which follow are intended to cover the Midland Counties and neighbouring places where local posts overlapped boundaries. Three obvious misreadings of the surveyors' writing are amended from Colridge, Kenvar, and Cambridge Tun! Other idiosyncracies remain as in the original, except the order. (Editor's Note: In order to fit the names into a table it has been necessary to shorten some. I hope that most of the idiosyncracies are unaltered.)

Those responsible for producing sketch maps for "The Local Posts of the Midland Counties to 1840" should find these lists helpful in determining routes and distances of some minor offices from their post towns. The only obvious mileage error is Fazeley's. After comparing figures with those on the 1830 list (MM65/9-10), the challenge is to discover when and why any considerable changes of mileage occurred. Most have been altered during those seven years; of 162 places on both lists within the "Midlands" only 28 have the same figure.

I do wonder whether the surveyors in 1837 had any idea why the distance of every office from London was wanted, even whether that was what the Committee was seeking to know. The distance of each minor office from its post town seems more useful; and that we can calculate, according to the contemporary figures the surveyors were able to give, lacking only the offices opened in the following two years - and those they forgot existed.

Key: 1 = Post Towns. 2 = Sub Post Towns (in Midland District "Sub Post Offices"). 3 = Penny Posts. 4 = Fifth-Clause Posts. (Northern District, following the Midland, is alone unrepresented in the extracts.)

#### HOME DISTRICT

|             |    |           |    |
|-------------|----|-----------|----|
| 1. Brackley | 74 | Towcester | 59 |
|-------------|----|-----------|----|

#### EASTERN DISTRICT

|                   |    |           |    |            |    |
|-------------------|----|-----------|----|------------|----|
| 1. Higham Ferrers | 65 | Kettering | 75 | Oundle     | 84 |
| Thrapstone        | 85 | Wansford  | 83 |            |    |
| 2. Deane          | 83 |           |    |            |    |
| 3. Brigstock      | 85 | Lowick    | 85 | Sudborough | 85 |

#### WESTERN DISTRICT

|                |     |            |     |           |     |
|----------------|-----|------------|-----|-----------|-----|
| 3. Cross Hands | 109 | Marshfield | 107 | Thornbury | 134 |
|----------------|-----|------------|-----|-----------|-----|

#### MIDLAND DISTRICT

|             |     |                |     |               |     |
|-------------|-----|----------------|-----|---------------|-----|
| 1. Alfreton | 139 | Ashborne       | 139 | Bakewell      | 153 |
| Belper      | 134 | Chesterfield   | 150 | Derby         | 126 |
| Leek        | 169 | Leicester      | 97  | Loughborough  | 109 |
| Mansfield   | 138 | Mkt Harborough | 83  | Matlock Bathe | 142 |

|                |     |                 |     |                |     |
|----------------|-----|-----------------|-----|----------------|-----|
| Melton Mowbray | 105 | Newark          | 122 | Northampton    | 65  |
| Nottingham     | 124 | Oakham          | 95  | Ollerton       | 138 |
| Peterborough   | 79  | Retford         | 142 | Rockingham     | 83  |
| Uppingham      | 89  | Wellingborough  | 76  | Wirksworth     | 144 |
| Worksop        | 146 |                 |     |                |     |
| 2. Bingham     | 121 | Chapel/Frith    | 170 | Melbourne      | 135 |
| Mountsorrel    | 105 | Southwell       | 130 | Stny Middleton | 159 |
| Tideswell      | 159 |                 |     |                |     |
| 3. Beeston     | 192 | Belton          | 111 | Castleton      | 166 |
| Collingham     | 129 | Crowland        | 95  | Donnington     | 109 |
| Dronfield      | 156 | Duffield        | 130 | Glossop        | 221 |
| Hathersage     | 163 | Matlock         | 144 | Newton         | 137 |
| Norton         | 167 | Sutton/Ashfield | 141 | Thorney        | 91  |
| Tickhill       | 154 | Waltham         | 119 | Whittlesea     | 87  |
| Wilbarston     | 89  | Winthorpe       | 125 |                |     |

NORTH WALES DISTRICT

|                   |     |                  |     |                |     |
|-------------------|-----|------------------|-----|----------------|-----|
| 1. Ashby/Zouch    | 116 | Atherstone       | 108 | Bilston        | 119 |
| Birmingham        | 108 | Bridgnorth       | 136 | Burton/Trent   | 125 |
| Cheadle           | 149 | Chirk            | 176 | Coleshill      | 102 |
| Coventry          | 90  | Daventry         | 71  | Dudley         | 118 |
| Dunchurch         | 79  | Eccleshall       | 148 | Ellesmere      | 169 |
| Hinckley          | 100 | Lawton           | 154 | Leamington     | 95  |
| Lichfield         | 117 | Lutterworth      | 89  | Mkt Drayton    | 153 |
| Newcastle (Stfs)  | 148 | Newport (Salop)  | 142 | Oswestry       | 170 |
| Penkridge         | 132 | Rugby            | 82  | Rugeley        | 125 |
| Shiffnal          | 134 | Shrewsbury       | 152 | Solihull       | 101 |
| Southam           | 86  | Stafford         | 137 | Stone          | 139 |
| Tamworth          | 117 | Uttoxeter        | 139 | Walsall        | 118 |
| Warwick           | 97  | Wednesbury       | 116 | Welford        | 80  |
| Wellington        | 144 | West Bromwich    | 113 | Whitchurch     | 166 |
| Wolverhampton     | 122 |                  |     |                |     |
| 2. Abbots Bromley | 133 | Church Stretton  | 165 | Fazeley        | 100 |
| Hales Owen        | 112 | Henley-in-Arden  | 101 | Heywood        | 137 |
| Shirleywich       | 139 | Sudbury (Derby)  | 144 | Wem            | 162 |
| Wolseley Bridge   | 127 | Woore            | 156 |                |     |
| 3. Alrewas        | 122 | Appleby          | 117 | Bedworth       | 95  |
| Betley            | 156 | Broseley         | 143 | Burslem        | 153 |
| Cobridge          | 153 | Etruria          | 150 | Hanley         | 152 |
| Iron Bridge       | 142 | Kenilworth       | 95  | King's Winford | 122 |
| Knowle            | 109 | Lane Delph       | 152 | Lane End       | 153 |
| Llanfyllin        | 185 | Llanhaiadr       | 184 | Llansaintfraid | 179 |
| Llanymynech       | 175 | Madeley (Staffs) | 154 | Malpas         | 171 |
| Measham           | 119 | Nuneaton         | 98  | Oldbury        | 113 |
| Sheepy            | 111 | Shelton          | 150 | Shirley Street | 116 |
| Stoke             | 151 | Stonebridge      | 98  | Sutton Colefld | 115 |
| Tunstall          | 153 | Twycross         | 114 | Weedon         | 65  |
| Wenlock           | 148 |                  |     |                |     |

SOUTH WALES DISTRICT

|                 |    |            |     |               |     |
|-----------------|----|------------|-----|---------------|-----|
| 1. Andoversford | 97 | Bewdley    | 133 | Bishop's Ctle | 165 |
| Broadway        | 93 | Bromsgrove | 121 | Bromyard      | 93  |
| Burford         | 79 | Campden    | 91  | Chalford      | 100 |

|                   |     |                                |     |                |     |
|-------------------|-----|--------------------------------|-----|----------------|-----|
| Chepstow          | 138 | Cirencester                    | 91  | Coleford       | 136 |
| Droitwich         | 127 | Dursley                        | 112 | Evesham        | 98  |
| Fairford          | 82  | Gloucester                     | 111 | Hay            | 160 |
| Hereford          | 139 | Highworth                      | 78  | Kidderminster  | 130 |
| Kineton           | 108 | Kington                        | 154 | Lechlade       | 78  |
| Ledbury           | 124 | Leominster                     | 140 | Ludlow         | 145 |
| Malvern           | 122 | Monmouth                       | 138 | Moreton/Marsh  | 84  |
| Newnham           | 123 | Northleach                     | 89  | Pershore       | 105 |
| Ross              | 128 | Shepston-on-Stour              | 87  | Stourbridge    | 123 |
| Stourport         | 137 | Stratford/Avon                 | 89  | Stroud         | 105 |
| Tenbury           | 136 | Tetbury                        | 110 | Tewkesbury     | 110 |
| Wooton/Edge       | 112 | Worcester                      | 114 |                |     |
| 2. Alcester       | 106 | Dunkirk                        | 108 | Eardsley       | 153 |
| Henley-in-Arden   | 106 | Kingscote                      | 109 | Lea            | 123 |
| Ledney            | 130 | Minchenhampton                 | 102 | Painswick      | 104 |
| Pembridge         | 148 | Redditch                       | 114 | Shobden        | 148 |
| Sodbury           | 111 | Stow                           | 88  | Studley        | 112 |
| Uley              | 110 | Upton-on-Severn and Penny Post |     |                | 116 |
| Wickwar           | 116 | Winchcombe and Penny Post      |     |                | 102 |
| 3. Acton Turville | 105 | Berkley                        | 118 | Bidford        | 105 |
| Bishop's Cleeve   | 105 | Blakeney                       | 126 | Blockley       | 88  |
| Bodenham          | 147 | Brailes                        | 95  | Broadwas       | 120 |
| Cambridge Inn     | 117 | Charlton Kings                 | 103 | Cherrington    | 91  |
| Clearwell         | 144 | Cleobury M'timer               | 141 | Cold Harbour   | 82  |
| Cross Hands       | 108 | Daglingworth                   | 94  | Eardesland     | 145 |
| Edgworth          | 98  | Feckenham                      | 117 | Frampton/S'ern | 119 |
| Goodrich          | 133 | Herewood End                   | 133 | Horseley       | 105 |
| Kempsey           | 118 | Kinvar                         | 128 | Letton         | 152 |
| London Rd Wcster  | 115 | Long Compton                   | 82  | Malvern Wells  | 124 |
| Messerdine        | 100 | Mitchel Dean                   | 126 | Nailsworth     | 104 |
| Newent            | 120 | Newland                        | 138 | North Nibley   | 114 |
| Ombersley         | 120 | Pencraig                       | 131 | Peterchurch    | 152 |
| Powick            | 117 | Prestbury                      | 103 | Redmarley      | 119 |
| St. Briavells     | 147 | St. John's                     | 115 | Stone          | 121 |
| Tintern Abbey     | 143 | Wellesbourn                    | 103 | Weobley        | 153 |
| Westbury/Severn   | 120 | Whitchurch (Hfd)               | 135 | Whitminster    | 121 |
| 4. Thornbury      | 133 |                                |     |                |     |

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INNS AS POST TOWNS- AND THE STORY OF FROGMILL, GLOUCESTERSHIRE

by John Calladine

It was while studying maps of the route of the London-Gloucester mailcoach that Frogmill first attracted attention for it was shown as a post town between Northleach and Cheltenham. Today Frogmill is no more than a substantial inn just off the A40, close to the abandoned Midland & South Western Junction Railway. Significantly there is no village at Frogmill. Could it really have had post town status? What significance could it have had? Inevitably a little research revealed a more extensive story than had been expected and since it has wider implications, it may be worth relating.

I am indebted to John Hine, not for the first time, for providing a copy of an article by the late W.G. Stitt Dibden. In February 1964 he wrote a piece in 'Stamp Collecting' which he called "Inns as Post-Towns". Its significance would have been missed by those who mis-read the title. That inns functioned as post offices, often in major towns, is not remarkable; that individual inns achieved post town status is a more obscure aspect of postal history and one that has received little attention.

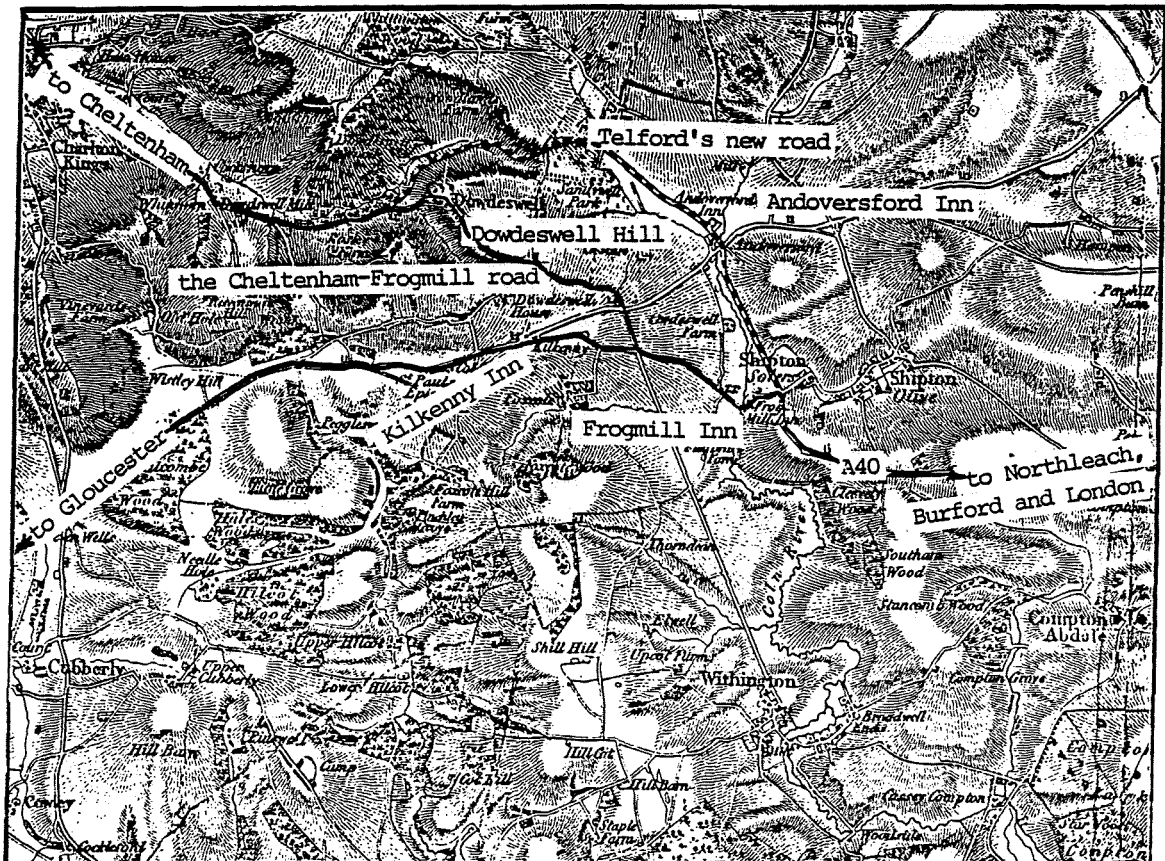
The story begins late in the 18th century with the introduction of mailcoaches. From 1784 these provided a secure and speedier conveyance of mail from and to London and progressively across the country. We are all aware that patent mailcoaches were built to a 'standard' but continuously improving pattern and that they were not the property of the Post Office. They were rented out to mailcoach contractors who became responsible for their day-to-day operation. While the guard was a Post Office employee, the provision of competent coachmen to handle the horses and drive the coach was a part of the contractors' responsibility. Stage coaches already changed horses at inns and innkeepers soon heard of the good drivers and the less able ones. Since the earliest days of the post and long before, it had been the innkeepers who provided horses for travellers and post boys. It is not surprising that innkeepers were uniquely qualified to function as mailcoach contractors.

Innkeepers had a further inherent advantage over other mailcoach contractors. We sometimes overlook the fact that the financial viability of a mailcoach service depended in no small measure on the passengers it attracted. Although relatively small in number, these were the 'Concorde passengers' of their day, paying premium fares for the additional speed of the mailcoach. These passengers sought comfortable and congenial surroundings as they waited for their coach and, possibly, overnight accommodation. This requirement made inns and innkeepers a vital part of the mailcoach operation.

What changed significantly with the dawn of the mailcoach era was the frequency at which teams of horses were changed. The post boys had ambled over stages of, perhaps, 20 miles, sometimes (as reported at the time) 'driving the horse in front of them'. Stage coaches changed horses at the inns in the nearest suitable town. Mailcoach teams had to be changed to meet the requirements of a Post Office timebill - it might be at ten miles intervals but, if the going were tough, a stage of just five or six miles might be quite long enough. This requirement coincided with another important change. In the two decades following the Napoleonic Wars and just as the mailcoach service was expanding, a

series of entirely new roads was constructed throughout England. Their purpose was usually to provide an easier and faster alternative to an existing difficult or circuitous route and they frequently by-passed established towns and villages completely. Some of these roads were built at the instigation of or with the support of the Superintendent of Mailcoaches and many, as soon as they were complete, became desirable mailcoach routes. Whether it is best likened to the notional chicken or the egg is unimportant but the first building to be constructed on a new road was likely to be an inn. Thus, in the remoter regions of the country and on the new roads, even in well-populated districts, certain inns became essential to the operation of particular mailcoach routes.

The traditional route to Gloucester from London used by pack horses and carriers' waggons had been through Abingdon, Faringdon and Lechlade. Not without reason was it known as 'the great Gloucestershire road'. However, as coach travel developed in the 18th century, this route had gradually been ousted by the Oxford road. It should have been no surprise that, when John Palmer selected the route of the new Gloucester mailcoach in 1785, he decided to send it via Wycombe, Oxford and Burford. Nevertheless, it caused some trouble at the time as a mailcoach route was a matter of significance to a provincial town and the people of Abingdon were dismayed. Beyond Burford the route lay through the wool town of Northleach and then followed the course of the present A40 to a point close to the village of Shipton Solers where the road made what must have been a dangerous curve down to the three gabled Frog Mill Inn. From here it continued via Chatcombe Hill to the Balloon Inn (now the 'Air Balloon') and down Crickley Hill to Gloucester. The 'Gloucester Flying Machine' in Brockworth is a relic of those days for the pub is named after a stagecoach rather than the Meteor jet fighter whose first flight must have been only a stone's throw away.



Frog Mill or Frogmill has a long history. It was originally a mill, of course, on the tiny River Coln and valued at 10/- in the Domesday survey. Adjoining the Coln was the dreaded Frogmarsh which achieved notoriety as a treacherous crossing place for pack horses. Eventually a small bridge was built and Frogmill developed into an inn. As the stage coach route between Gloucester and Oxford became established, Frogmill became a staging inn for coaches. Cheltenham was a town of little significance for much of the 18th century and passengers for the Gloucester-Oxford-London stage coaches were brought from the town by post chaise to a suitable inn for collection. That this inn should have been Frogmill is evident from the map of the area but, in about 1760, a rivalry developed that foreshadowed future happenings. Competing coach masters in Gloucester chose slightly different roads from the Kilkenny Inn to the line of the present A40 so that one took his coach to Andoversford rather than Frogmill, a point about a mile closer to Cheltenham. John Collier, an innkeeper at Andoversford, then advertised that he had "at considerable expence, made great additions" to his house and he assured travellers that "notwithstanding the many and repeated invidious attempts which have been made by an interested neighbour" (i.e. Thomas Humphreys of Frogmill) to injure him, "the road leading from Gloucester to Burford and Oxford by his house is equally as near by any Admeasurement as the road by Frogmill." This was a half truth at best and it was seized upon by Thomas Humphreys who begged leave to "undeceive" the public and to state that "the road from Gloucester, by Frogmill, to Burford has, from time immemorial, been an accustomed publick road" and that the road in the Andoversford advertisement "leads to Stow and Campden" and that part of the connection to Burford was "only a private way from one parish to another upon sufferance at and for the convenience of the farmers." In 1780 Daniel Field, then innkeeper at Frogmill, was able to place an advertisement to say that "Andoversford is now entirely shut up."

There appears to have been no direct route from Cheltenham to Frogmill until about 1786. In May of that year, a notice appeared in the Gloucester Journal seeking financial backing for a "new road now making between Cheltenham and Frogmill, through the parish of Dowdeswell, by which the distance between Gloucester and Frogmill will be the same as through the heavy vale and up the long and steep hills of Crickley and Chatcombe now used." It was said that the new road would have "no material hill to ascend" but this must have been wishful thinking for the ascent at Dowdeswell was difficult and steep (about 1 in 8). Nevertheless, the road soon became of postal significance for the route of the Gloucester mailcoach was changed to take it through Cheltenham.

The cause of this significant change was the visit of George III to Cheltenham in the summer of 1788. The king, who was having one of his periodical health problems, came to the town to take the waters. His apparent cure instantly put Cheltenham on the map and, lacking the steep hills of Bath, it acquired great popularity. While the king was in Cheltenham, special Royal Mailcoach arrangements were made but it was the sudden influx of visitors, travelling by coach, that led to the change of mailcoach route for, as mentioned earlier, passengers were vital to mailcoach finances. Since the new road to Cheltenham through Dowdeswell left the old Gloucester route on the Gloucester side of Frogmill, Frogmill's status was enhanced rather than reduced. Furthermore, this road did not pass through Andoversford and therefore Frogmill was unchallenged as a staging point,  $6\frac{3}{4}$  miles from Northleach and  $5\frac{3}{4}$  miles from Cheltenham. The hill at Dowdeswell and a further climb from Frogmill to Piesdown ensured that no one could run a stage coach, let alone a mailcoach, between the two towns without a change of horses. By the 1820s, no fewer than 20 coaches changed teams there daily. Its strat-

egic and unchallenged position was the key to its imminent post town status.

In 1787, John Howes (who described himself as "butler to R.P. Knight Esq and late butler to Sir Hungerford Hoskyns") took over the Frogmill Inn. He was not the mailcoach contractor for the contract was originally given to the landlord of the Kings Head, Gloucester, but soon transferred to John Philpotts of The Bell in the same city. However, when John Howes first appears in the Post Office accounts as a salaried deputy (i.e. postmaster), he was paid a considerable sum for riding work. In the year ending 5th April 1794, his salary was just £4 a year but riding work added £92.18.4. The reason for this is not known but during the 1790s and possibly in the winter months from its inception, the London-Gloucester mailcoach service had a chequered existence and, for some part of the time, a ride was substituted, perhaps beyond Oxford. Some clue to what may have happened between 1789 and 1794 is provided by a letter from the Surveyor, Samuel Woodcock, to Francis Freeling. On 16th March 1793, he reported "the post boy bringing the mail from Frogmill to Gloucester had the misfortune to be thrown from his horse and to break a leg." Whereas the mailcoach, when running, continued through Cheltenham to Gloucester, it seems possible that, at times a ride was substituted, the bags for Cheltenham and Gloucester travelled their separate ways from Frogmill. This is supported by a contemporary account of 1789 which describes the appalling state of the stretch of road between Cheltenham and Gloucester. Although it was said to have become "one of the most public roads in the island", it was said to be "scarcely fit for the meanest of their Majesties' subjects to travel on ... and much less suitable for their Majesties themselves and their amiable family."

The salary of the postmaster at Frogmill progressively increased from £4 in 1790 to £10 in 1825 but there was no significant payment for riding work after 1794, suggesting a continuous mailcoach service. John Howes was replaced by a man called Smith in 1798 and he was followed by Lewes (or Lewis) in 1809 and by Meadows in 1815. That the inn continued to be well run is confirmed by a report of 1803. Frogmill is described as "a most comfortable house and much frequented by dinner and pleasure parties." However its future lay in other hands, notably those of the famous road builder, Thomas Telford. In 1824, Telford reported on his plans for improving the London to South Wales mail road. The problems of the stretch between Cheltenham and Frogmill were soon highlighted. Of Dowdeswell Hill, he wrote:

"here. for a considerable way, the ascent is 1 in 8 and afterwards 1 in 11. The inconvenience of this hill were so notorious that the district Trustees had, previously to my survey, obtained one for a new line up a valley on the northern side of the hill, so as to avoid it, and join the present road again a little to the eastward of Frog Mill. Upon comparing this survey with the ground, I found it sufficiently correct and have therefore adopted it."

Not only did this new line of road (nearly 3 miles long) by-pass Frogmill and its notorious bend, albeit by a mere 100 yards or so, but it passed through Andoversford which, one may recall, had provided the fruitless challenge to Frogmill's local supremacy in the 1760s.

In May 1826, Freeling wrote to the Postmaster General:

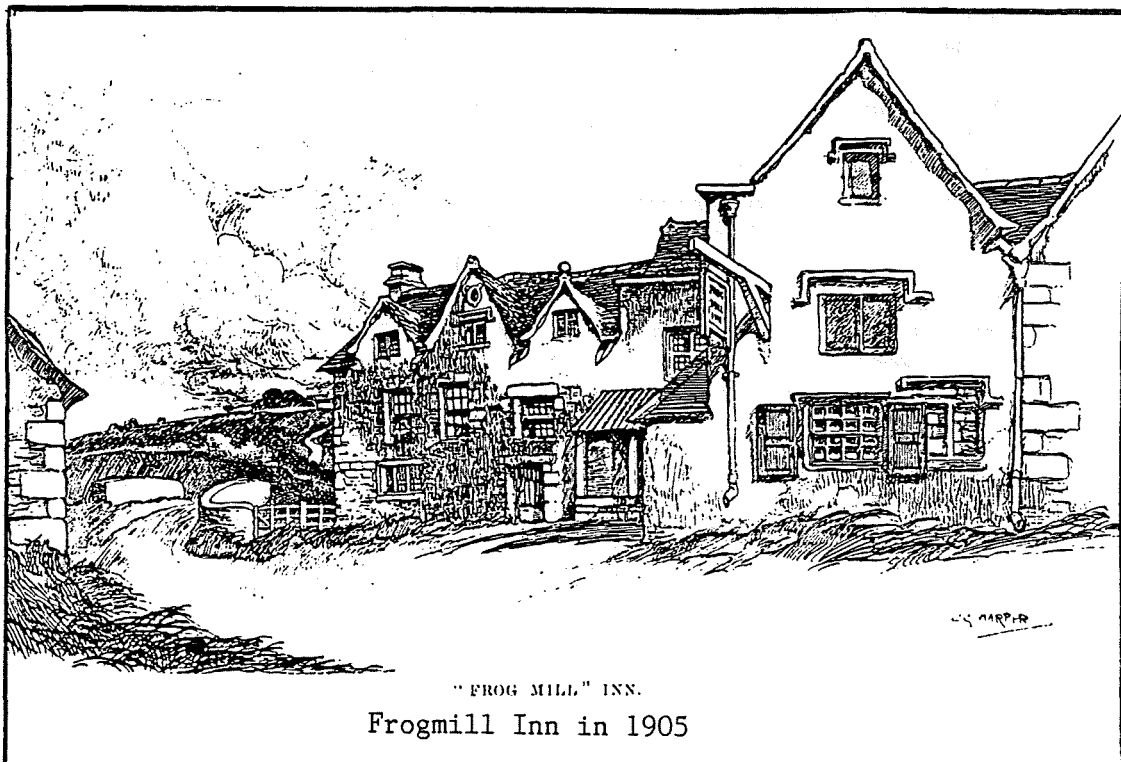
"In the latter end of last year, when the new road avoiding Dowdeswell Hill at Cheltenham was forming, application was made to remove the post office from Frogmill to Andoversford. Frogmill, although but a single house, is considered a post town having a London Bag for the

accommodation of the neighbourhood ... The mailcoach has now travelled over this road avoiding Frogmill to which house and place the bags have been conveyed by messenger ... The Surveyor proposes that the office may be removed from Frogmill to Andoversford. This removal will increase the distance for some to send their letters but will decrease it for others ... Mr Telford, in his report of the Survey of the road from Northleach to Milford recommends this new road passing by Andoversford as the line for the mail to run. The Superintendent of Mail-coaches also approves of the road.

The salary to Frogmill is only £10 a year. The place is in fact but a single inn - Andoversford is also but a single inn (just built on the new road) ... A case of hardship can hardly be made out for the Deputy at Frogmill on being deprived of his salary when the duty is moved to another House."

Of course, we know from the earlier rivalry that there was more than a single inn at Andoversford and a number of old houses and cottages are still to be found there. The inn built on the new line of road appears on the early Ordnance Survey map but is no longer there. It would probably have been in the path of the Cheltenham-Banbury railway which was built in 1881.

The construction of Telford's new road, the loss of the post office and the coming of the railways combined to bring about the demise of Frogmill inn. In 1905, the author Charles Harper visited what he called "the poor old Frog Mill inn .. once the fine late seventeenth century hostelry." In a vivid account of its condition he said "Three parts of this fine old stone-built house have been unfurnished these many years and the roof and floors are in the last stages of decay. Only a dilapidated range of outhouses and stables, relics of the days when this was a coaching inn, remains and the wall of them impends in so tottery a fashion over the waters of the little River Coln that one goes gently, lest it feel the vibration and at last takes that long-contemplated plunge.

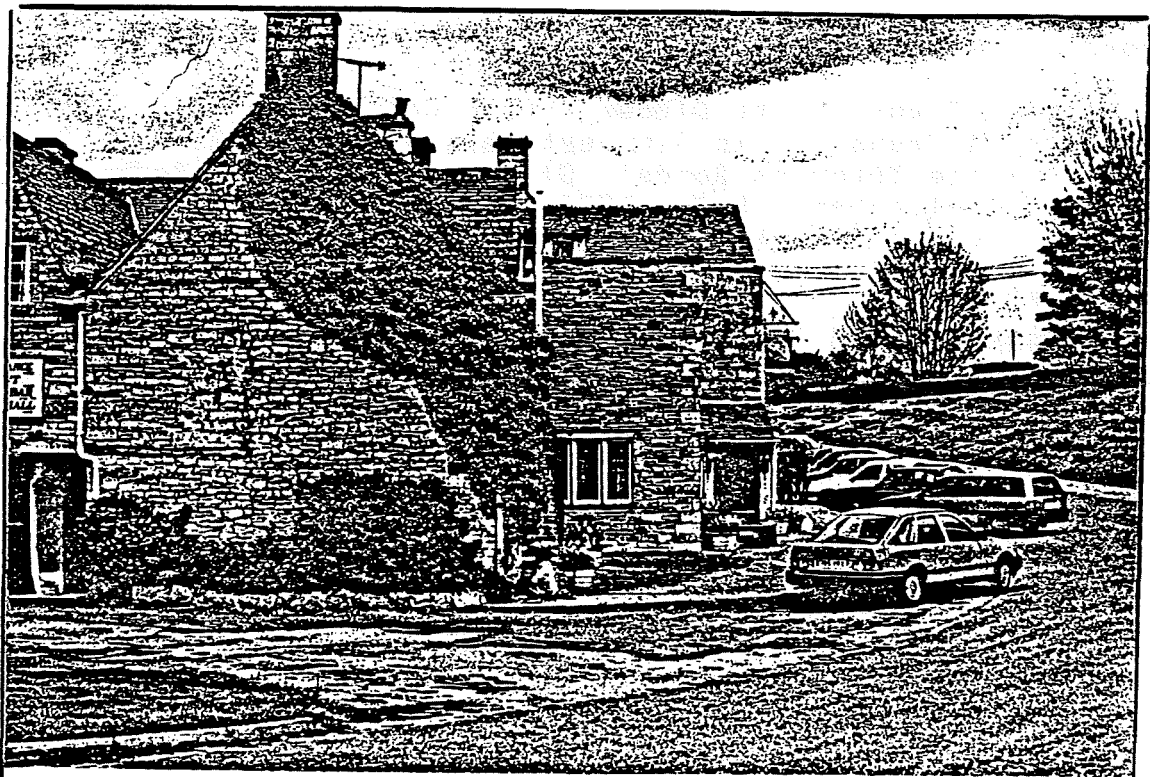


"FROG MILL" INN.  
Frogmill Inn in 1905

Happily, although not relevant to its postal history, Frogmill came back from the dead. A letter in 'The Field' magazine of 1955 is headed 'Coaching Inn Returns'.

"The old Frogmill Inn, situated a short distance off the A40 road near Andoversford, which was once used by the London-Gloucester mail-coaches, has been restored into a road house. The old inn was left in a by-road when the London road was diverted in the latter days of the horse coaches but the old road is now being opened up again to provide a direct route to Gloucester avoiding Cheltenham, giving a lease of life to the old inn."

Much has happened since 1955. The railway that was built in 1890 and ran by the inn, has closed and the line of the Gloucester road past the inn has changed again. In recent years Frogmill Inn has been further enlarged but, by diverting into the closed section of the old road, now used for car parking, the inn may be seen much as it was in mailcoach days.



Frogmill Inn as it is today - 1991

In his 1964 article, Stitt Dibden made the point that the real test of an office taking the dignity (and postal importance) of a post town was the issue of a mileage mark. If so, Frogmill was doubly blessed for two are recorded; a single example of a first type stamp of doubtful mileage in 1791 and a boxed mileage mark 'Frogmill/95', known used in 1815 and 1816. Examples are rare and very much scarcer than might be expected. I am grateful to Chris Beaver for drawing my attention to the change in the Gloucester mileage stamps between 1786 (103 miles) and 1801 (111 miles). This was brought about by the change of the mailcoach route to take it through Cheltenham. The subsequent construction of Telford's road through Andoversford only increased the overall distance by 700 yards. Andoversford's first handstamp, also a

mileage mark, is recorded in 1828 ('Andoversford/94' - not 96!), two years after it assumed Frogmill's role, and a circular datestamp was issued in 1838 although, interestingly, it has not yet been recorded with date slugs. Andoversford was not relegated to sub-office status until 1842.

Stitt Dibden writes of other inns that may or may not have been post towns - Old Down near Wells, Cross near Bristol, Peacock Inn in Derbyshire, Bramham Moor in Yorkshire, Hundred House at Stonebridge and Cavendish Bridge in Leicestershire. He concluded his article by saying

"These notes on a little-known aspect of British postal history show that opportunities for research still exist in what is a fascinating glimpse of the historic past of the Post Office."

It may not have been an original remark, even in 1964, but 27 years on it remains as true as ever.

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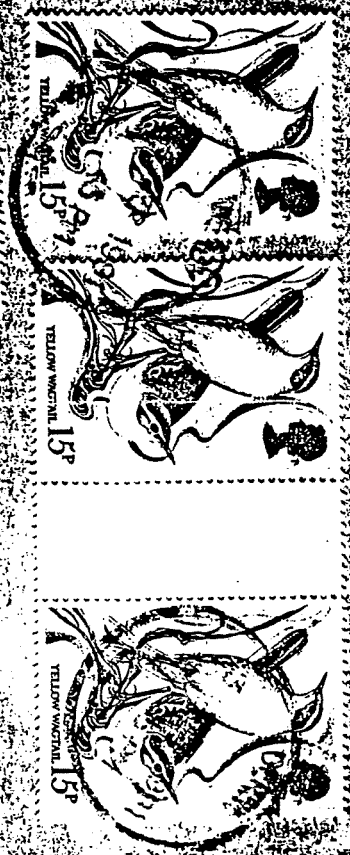
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TAILPIECE

"M.W. Mowbray 1st Clerk in the Leicester Post Office who, when on duty alone, admitted two females into the office, on the night of 13th January last, be dismissed as recommended by the Surveyor." Perhaps the P.M.G. thought that it was a case of "three's a crowd."

Post 35/1248/1856.

THE NEXT MIDLAND MAIL

It is hoped that this will appear in January. The article on the postal history on a Midlands town which has had to be held over for two issues should appear. Also the first instalment in a serialisation of the Surveyors' Journals is planned. All contributions will be gratefully received by:

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