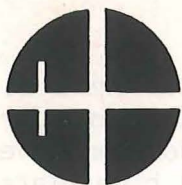


MIDLAND MAIL



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 86, August 1994

"How long before we see a post office without any letters?" was my first reaction to the proposals for the privatisation, wholly or in part, of the Post Office, in which we could find P.O. Counters publicly owned whilst the letters and parcels businesses become private companies. I am not impressed by these attempts, by the Government, to try to calm nervous backbenchers from rural seats. It is possible that the promise to safeguard the daily delivery to rural areas would, in the event of privatisation, be kept, but I am not at all confident about this. Surely, the role of a private company is to make the maximum profit to allow for reinvestment in the industry and to give a fair return to the shareholders, and not to subsidise loss-making activities. (Newspaper proprietors excepted.) Whatever, I shall not be surprised if the postal circulation and railway maps of 1998 resemble those of 1838.

One advantage put forward for the privatisation is that it would free the Post Office from the constraints imposed by the Treasury. Why not privatise that organisation with its archaic rules and unparalleled record of incorrect forecasts?

No doubt, you have all received recently a document from the Local Government Commission giving details of possible new structures for local government. In the one that we received it states: "The Royal County of Berkshire would be retained for ceremonial and other traditional purposes." In other words, it will cease to exist. I will not bore you with the reasons for my thinking that the breaking up of the counties into smaller units is undesirable. The fact that all of our collections contain significant quantities of 'county material' is not amongst them. However, there is one aspect that should interest postal historians, and that is the fate of the County Record Offices should the counties be split up for administrative purposes. No one, so far, has been able to tell me who will be responsible for funding them. Will their contents be divided amongst the new authorities, or sold to the highest bidder? Or is it that no one has given the matter any thought?

THE ASSOCIATION OF BRITISH PHILATELIC SOCIETIES

The Association to which we as a Society belong has requested information on members willing to display and/or judge at Society or Federation level. Also those willing to join teams who will lecture to societies on certain subjects. Our Secretary has condensed their questionnaires into a single sheet, a copy of which is enclosed for your use.

Please complete the sheet with details and deletions as necessary and return to him by mid-September.

THE MAY MEETING

A joint meeting with the Shropshire Postal History Society was held at the Beauchamp Hotel, Shrewsbury on Saturday 14th May. Guest speaker for the day was Robert Johnson, a member of the Society of Postal Historians. Mr Johnson gave the well attended meeting a real treat with his marvellous display of 2d blue plates on cover. The first part of the display consisted of covers posted to places within Great Britain, followed by two further sections of covers to all parts of the globe. Many of the covers bore multiples of three or four 2d blues and one even had seventeen affixed to it. In all a very memorable display enjoyed by all.

After lunch, members of the two societies gave short displays as listed below:
 Harold Wilson - Airmails and Railways.
 Denis Salt - Ship Letters.
 Richard Farman - Registered Letters.
 Jim Ball - Wellington.
 David Hardwick - The London-Shrewsbury T.P.O.
 Elizabeth and Eric Lewis - You Cannot Be Serious.
 Chris Beaver - Shropshire Connections with Staffordshire.
 Sadie Cole - Barred Numerals of Radnorshire.

Because time ran out two displays were not shown. The attendance and quality of the displays continues to improve and shows just how popular these meetings have become.

I am indebted to the Secretary of the Shropshire Society for the above report.

A NEW EDITION OF THE UDC BOOK

As many members will know, the Society will be producing a 4th edition of our book on Undated Circular Marks to celebrate the Society's 21st birthday. This will include the county of Oxfordshire for the first time and also important data on the Money Order Offices. However, the new edition will further provide, possibly for the last time, an opportunity to update the usage data and members who have unreported UDCs are **URGENTLY REQUESTED** to notify details either to the Coordinating Editor or the relevant County Editor **NOT LATER THAN 1st NOVEMBER**. Your continued help will be much appreciated. We would also be most interested to hear of any use of SKELETON DATESTAMPS between 1830 and 1860 at offices that previously used a UDC.

W.J.C.

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

BY ROAD AND RAIL IN 1837-8

by Rev. Christopher Beaver

Some members may have noticed my comment in the British Philatelic Bulletin for June on an article concerning T.P.O.s by Kenneth Chapman in the April number. He supposed the 'first contract for mail carrying by rail' was on the London and Birmingham Railway in May 1838, omitting any reference to the contracts with the Liverpool and Manchester Railway operative from November 1830 and with the Grand Junction Railway from July 1837. Strange to relate the Editor chose to illustrate the article with the 1980 strip of stamps issued for the 150th anniversary of the L.&M.R. which shows an obvious mailcoach at the rear of the train!

Arrangements under the 1837 contract were the subject of an article in MM40, 'By Coach and Rail 1837-8'. Several fresh details have come to light since that was written. The signature on the 'List of Mail Coaches from London', and there can be no doubt its date is 22nd Nov 1837, is of Thomas Wedderburn, and he had recently been promoted to be senior clerk of the Mail Coach Office. His career began as a young junior clerk ten years before and he was unusual in that he rose right through the ranks without any transfer to have experience of other post office work. From December 1852 to July 1854, he was 'Surveyor and Superintendant of Mail Coaches', the fifth and last to bear that title. By that time most of his department's labours were actually concerned with railways. The title was therefore a misnomer. Predictably Rowland Hill, almost as soon as he obtained appointment as Secretary of the Post Office, set up a 'Mail Office' in place of the M.C.O. From 1st August 1854, Wedderburn became Deputy Inspector General of Mails, serving until 1860 under a dynamic and very capable high-flyer, Edward John Page. For an account of the whole story of 'The Mail Coach Office' see the Spring 1994 edition of Cross Post (the Journal of Friends of the National Postal Museum).

The most peculiar feature of Wedderburn's list, peculiar because it lasted only a few months, is that five of the coaches ran for 109 miles over exactly the same ground. These are the ones here entitled:-

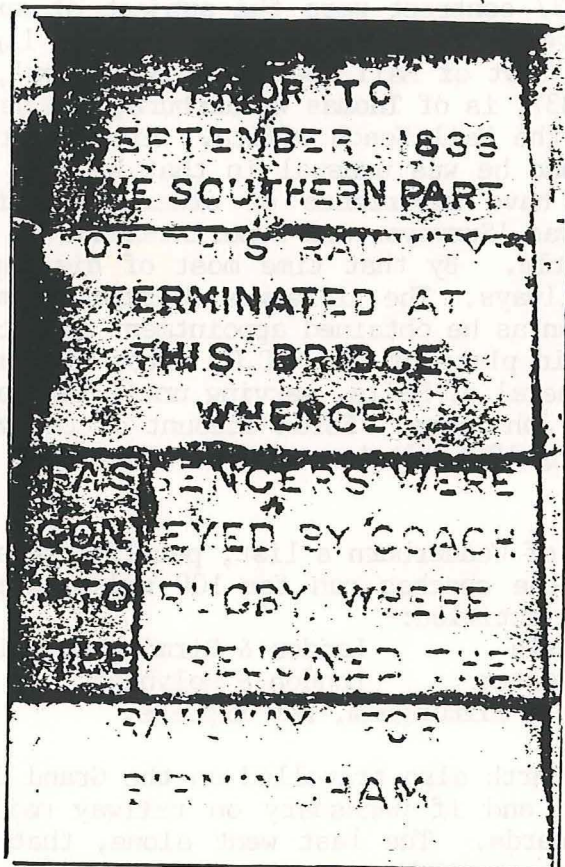
London & Birmingham, Carlisle	London & Birmingham, Liverpool
London & Birmingham, Manchester	London & Holyhead
London & Birmingham, Day Express.	

All of these except the fourth also travelled on the Grand Junction Railway or rather their mail bags did, in and if necessary on railway mailcoaches under the protection of P.O. appointed guards. The last went alone, that is at a different time from the others, and the shortest distance by rail, that is from Birmingham as far as Hartford, a station in the Cheshire countryside. There the mail was transferred again to a coach-and-four for its journey via Chester and Conway, over the Menai Bridge, to Holyhead. Elsewhere in the records this mail, which left London at 8 a.m. at the time, was given a more accurate title, the 'Dublin Express Day Mail'. It began on 4th September 1837 and was the first of the additional mails to be dispatched from London in the morning. In the other direction it could appropriately have been named the Continental Express since it was primarily meant, from that perspective, to carry foreign mails from Ireland. It was an express because the mail was no longer delayed for fourteen hours or so at the G.P.O. in London, in each direction of course.

One of Kenneth Chapman's slips was to suppose that when the Railway Times reported that on 22nd May 1838 'Mail coaches for Holyhead, Manchester, Liverpool and Carlisle were transported on trucks on the London and Birmingham Railway' they went by rail to Birmingham (and there all of them continued by road). Not so. I sent him the inscription on a bridge along the A5 (still there I trust). It records what in fact happened from April to September because of the difficulties the engineers encountered when constructing Kilsby Tunnel. A little north of Bletchley and to the south of Stoney Stratford the railway line crossed the Watling Street. There a

temporary station was erected and a humble inn, the Pig and Whistle, tarted up and no doubt stabling added at least, became Denbigh Hall. On the opening of the railway sections between Tring and Denbigh Hall and between Rugby and Birmingham, both on April 9th, stage coaches were ready to meet the trains and convey passengers across the remaining thirty-eight mile gap. It was a few weeks before the Post Office began to compete with them, mail being carried on the L.&B.R. from 7th May, mailcoaches from the 22nd.

It should be no surprise that the annual parade of London mailcoaches on 17th May 1838 turned out to be the last - even though it was to be another sixteen years before the Mail Coach Office came to an end. The first such procession was back in 1785, a few years before the use of patent coaches, but the term 'mailcoach' was already normal.



Left: A plaque on an A5 road bridge marks the location of the one-time Denbigh Hall Inn, north of Bletchley, whence road coaches conveyed London and Birmingham passengers to Rugby between April and September 1838, before the completion of the Kilsby Tunnel.

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

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

by John Calladine

Part 3 - Avoiding New Passage

In May 1794, the merchants of Cork made the first of several requests for the Milford Haven mailcoach to go from London via Oxford, Gloucester and Brecon, a route not unlike that of 1785 but through Ross, Monmouth and Abergavenny rather than Hereford. They claimed that this route would be both shorter and quicker. They might have added that it avoided New Passage. It was left to Thomas Hasker to provide a considered response on behalf of the Postmasters General. He conceded that a route through Gloucester might save two hours, both up and down, but, having discussed the matter with Francis Freeling (the future Secretary of the Post Office) he wrote of other important considerations. Here one can detect Freeling's influence for he was a protege of John Palmer and familiar with the interests of both Bath and Bristol. Hasker came to the defence of the Bristol route:

"Bristol, through which the mailcoach travels to Ireland, is a kind of metropolis of South Wales. The business of the inhabitants lies very much with that city as does the commerce of Cork, Waterford and the south of Ireland in general."

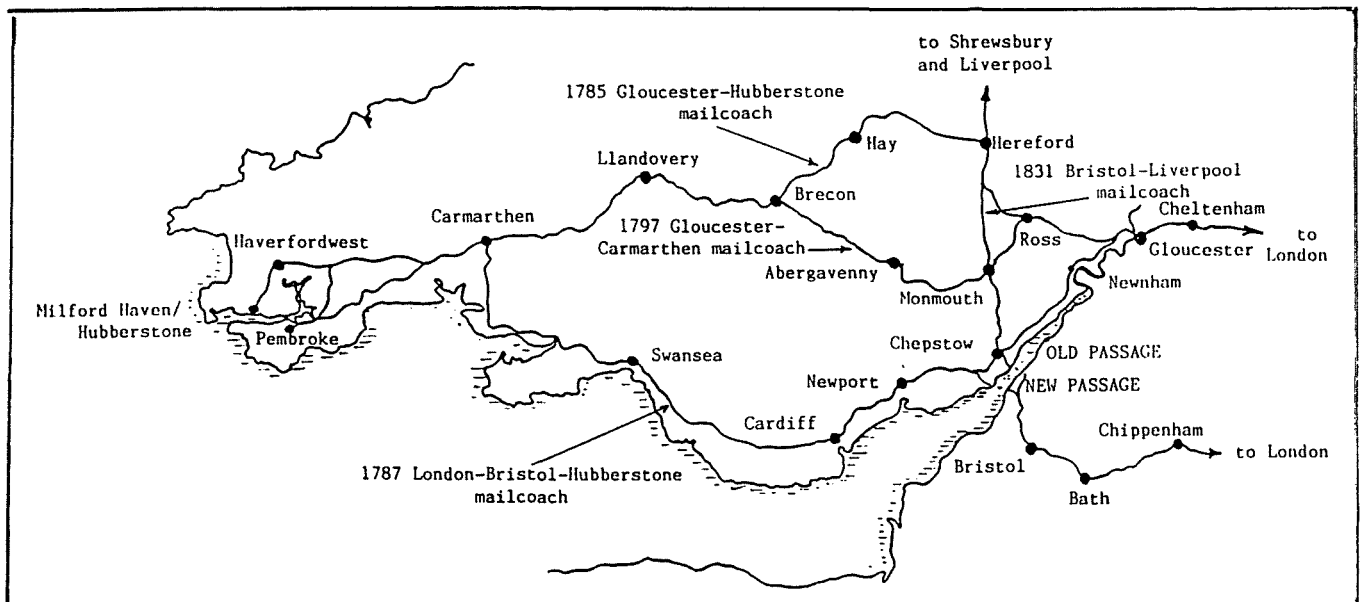
The latter seems a strange thing to be telling the merchants of Cork! He continued:

" . . . the cutting of all communications for travellers and luggage by coach between Milford and Bristol would be a very great inconvenience . . . and I believe I may say that half the passengers have concerns with Bristol, Bath or the West of England."

Hasker therefore concluded that, if a coach to Milford Haven were to be operated via Gloucester, it could only be thrice weekly and, even on those three days, postal communication between Bristol and Ireland would have to be maintained by means of a ride between New Passage and Ragland which would connect with (what would become on those days) a Bristol-Swansea coach. Of New Passage, he wrote:

"I think the delay on the ferry, on the average, full half an hour. An hour is allowed (sometimes two or three) but then it must be remembered they get on their way three miles during this time."

He did not go as far as recommending rejection of the proposal but, by emphasising the supposed complexity and additional expense of the new plan, ensured that nothing was done.



Two years later, the proposal surfaced again when the Hon C.F.Greville submitted a memorial for an identical plan. In a correspondence over several months, Hasker now pursued his point that any coach through Gloucester and Brecon could only run three times a week and added the suggestion that, if a contractor would care to run a "light coach" on the route for six months and make a success of it, he would then give the coach mail to carry. In September 1796, all parties eventually agreed to such a trial. While Hasker had appeared to oppose any alteration to the route of the Milford mail, he was also very unhappy with the state of affairs at New Passage. In the same month that the trial of a light coach between Gloucester and Carmarthen began, he sent his representative, Mr Charlton, to New Passage with instructions to make the ferry crossing in both directions on three or more days and to keep a detailed record of every relevant fact. "Inform the proprietors of the boats, coachmen etc", he wrote, "that there are prodigious complaints at the detention in crossing which is often two hours lately and never less than one - though I have crossed the passage a hundred times or upwards" (a claim of doubtful veracity) "more than half of which passages have been made in 20 minutes." When Charlton sent his first report, in October 1796, Hasker advised him to tell all concerned that "they must awake or the coach will go by the other passage", a threat that Old Passage would be used. The ferry did not receive all the blame and Mr Bradley, chairman of the coach contractors, was clearly another villain of the piece. The stage coaches being used as 'non-patent' mailcoaches were not necessarily fitted with locked mail boxes and were being overloaded. The contractors further infuriated the Post Office when, in the same November, the up mail was delayed at Newport by damage to a bridge. The guard, as would be expected of him, left the mailcoach, took a horse and made his way to New Passage. Having crossed to the Gloucestershire side, he demanded another horse at the New Passage Inn to take him and the mail bags to Bristol. When he was denied one, he took the waiting coach - another confirmation that mailcoaches did not cross the water. All was fine until the delayed passengers made the ferry crossing, only to find that there was no coach and that they were left to fend for themselves. Mr Morgan, the innkeeper, was told that, if it ever happened again, the mail would go to Old Passage. The Welsh contractors seemed impervious to threats. Within a fortnight, Hasker wrote to all the contractors on the Bristol-Milford route pointing out that, notwithstanding his representative's presence, "the coach is worked worse than ever. I never saw such a (time)bill as came up today. I am out of all patience with this coach and have a great mind to take the mail from it immediately and send it the other road." Whether he intended to imply a move to Old Passage, as threatened before, or a move to a route through Gloucester is not clear but it cannot have harmed the cause of those seeking a second mailcoach to Milford via Gloucester.

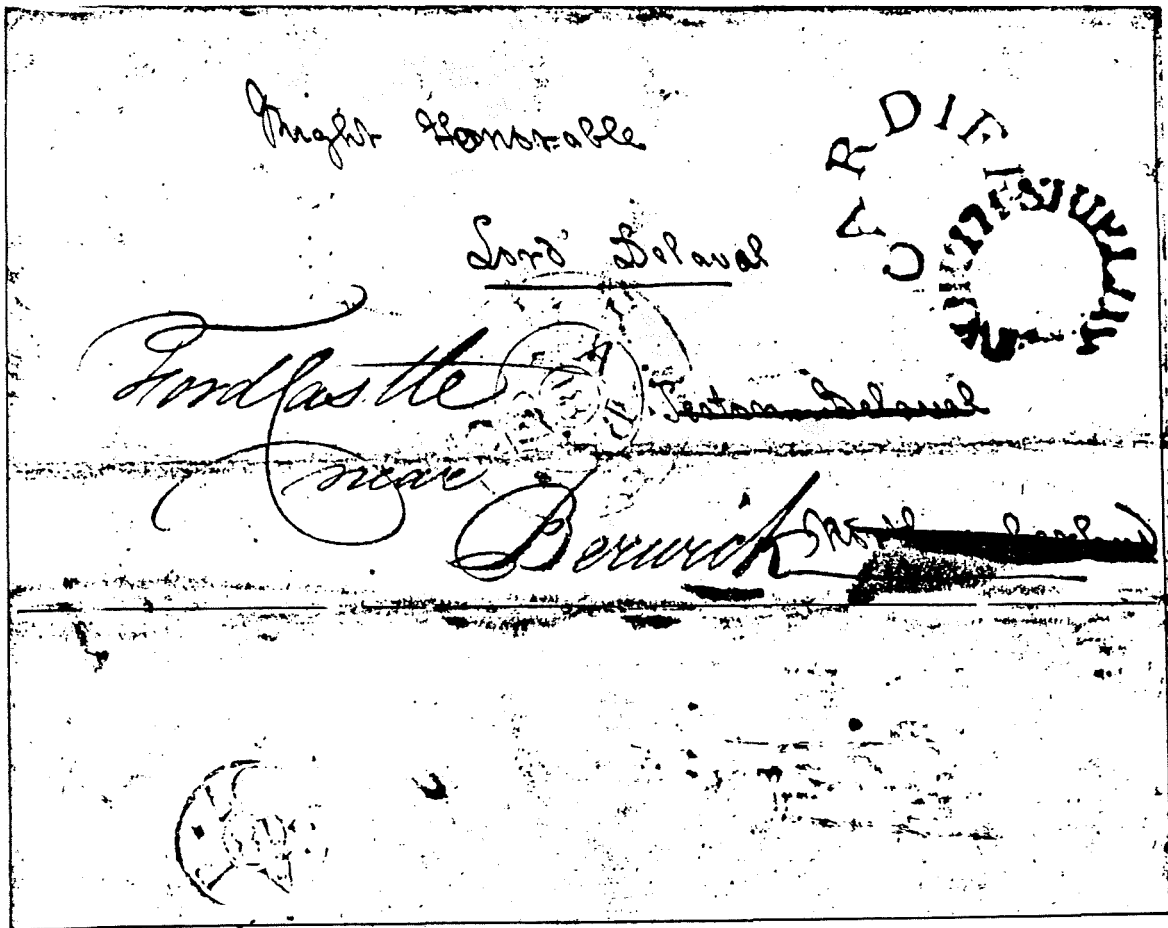
The trial of a private coach on the Gloucester-Carmarthen route in the winter of 1796/97 was judged a success and, as promised, a 3-day 3rd class mailcoach was introduced on the route on 5th April 1797. At the same time, the Bristol-Milford mailcoach became a 4-day coach, probably in accord with the proposals of 1794. Thus the London letters for Ireland were carried four days a week on the southern route and three days a week on the northern route, the two mails combining at Carmarthen with a daily coach from Carmarthen to Milford Haven. In spite of Thomas Hasker's opposition to the Gloucester route, it proved the better way and, probably early in 1805, the northern coach became daily and thereafter may have carried all the Irish mail to and from London. In 1808, the Bristol-Milford mail also became daily beyond Swansea, the two coaches combining at Carmarthen where, it has been suggested, the duty between Carmarthen and Milford Haven alternated between the coaches of the southern and northern routes.

Although Chepstow had been by-passed by travellers for many years, it was the introduction of the Bristol-Milford mail across New Passage that led to London letters also by-passing the town. The introduction of the northern route in 1797 did not change the situation. From 1787, Chepstow was linked to New Passage by

a ride and, since the Gloucester-Swansea coach had been withdrawn, to Gloucester by another ride of which the Chepstow postmaster was responsible for the stage to Newnham. In 1810, the postmaster appealed to the surveyor for an increased allowance, adding a postscript:

"One thing is to be observed, that I don't get a shilling either (from) the Newnham Ride or the (New) Passage by parcels . . ."

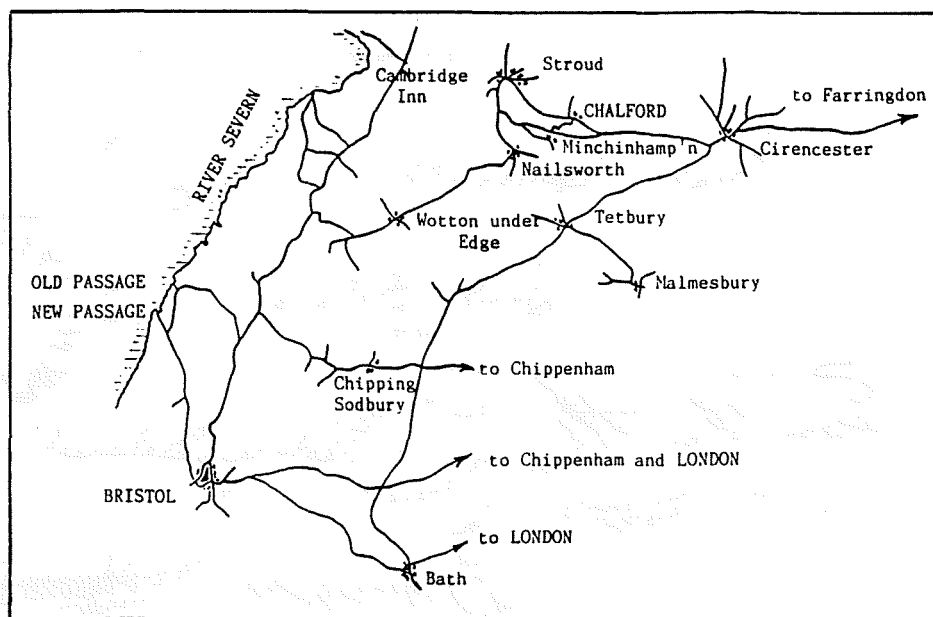
A small increase was granted but his successor sought a further increase in 1820 on the grounds that he needed four horses and was only paid for three. In 1824, the Bristol-Milford Haven coach was accelerated and the rider subsequently left Chepstow for New Passage at 11am. The surveyor made the point that he carried the "London and West of England letters" and it is perhaps surprising that the London letters were not routed via Gloucester as they surely would have been if a Gloucester-Chepstow mailcoach had survived. In 1820, the difficult hill on the Chepstow side of Newnham was lowered by taking off the top but no mailcoach returned to this road until the 1830s.



A letter dated 18th April 1797 from Cardiff to Northumberland - and subsequently re-addressed - via New Passage and London.

It was another road improvement in a different, apparently unrelated, part of Gloucestershire and many miles from the Severn that indirectly revived the fortunes of both Chepstow and Old Passage. The important small town of Chalford, then the

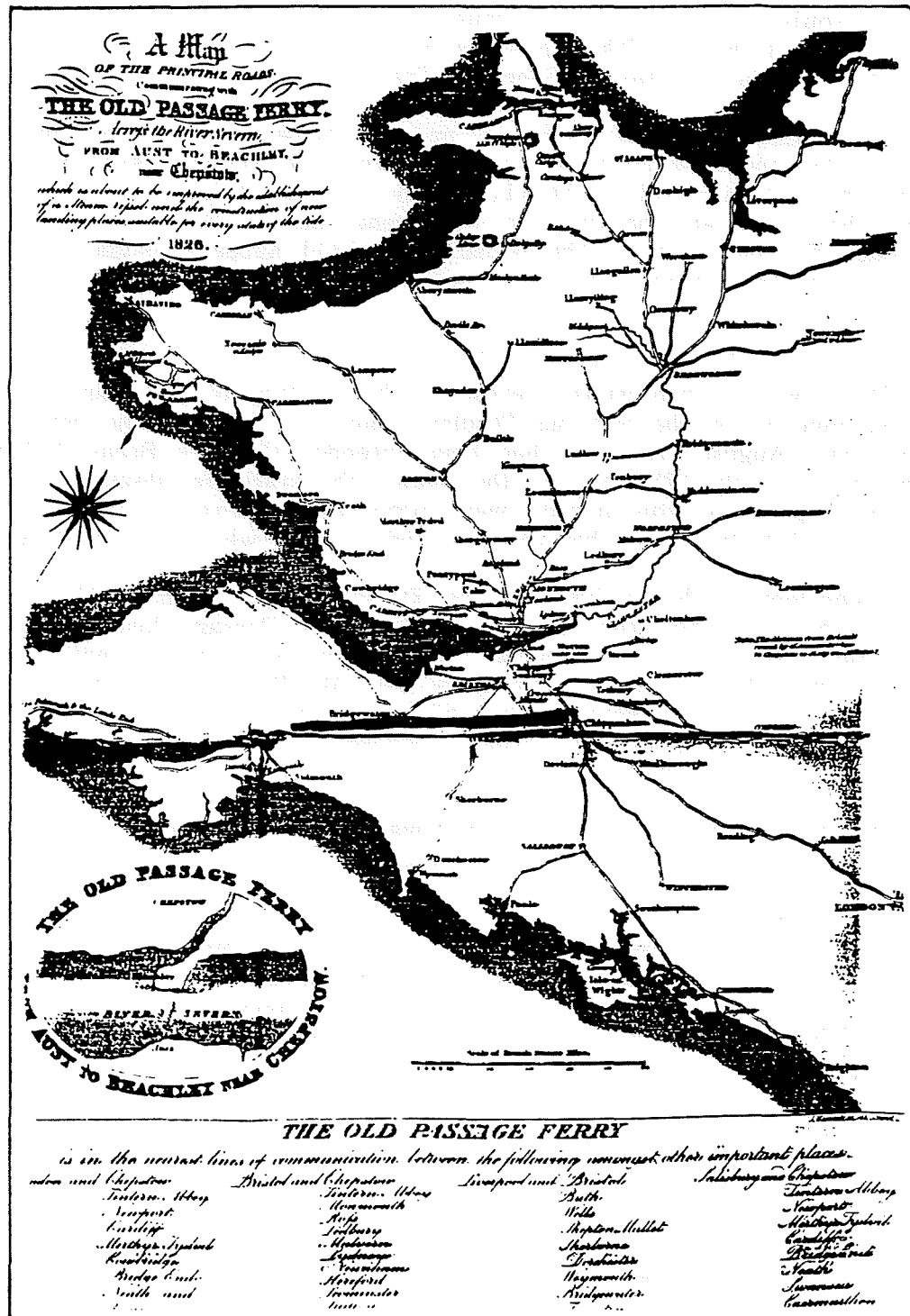
home of many woollen mills, is situated between Cirencester and Stroud. However, because of a very steep hill on the Cirencester side of the town, the main road avoided Chalford and continued on the top of the hills through Minchinhampton, eventually making a tortuous descent to Stroud. The construction of a new Chalford valley road from 1814 changed all that and inevitably, by the 1820s, the main road from Stroud to Cirencester and London was through Chalford. In the mid-1820s, the London-Stroud mailcoach (which had run briefly and intermittently in 1785 and 1786) was revived on a new line and Chalford was considered for post town status. Furthermore, in August 1826, a new branch mailcoach was established from Chalford, through Nailsworth, Horsley and Wotton under Edge, to Chepstow. The Chalford-Chepstow mailcoach became the first mailcoach to use Old Passage. This was no accident. The proprietors of the Old Passage ferry were so keen to "gain the celebrity" of a mailcoach using their ferry that they agreed to carry the mail without charge, believing they would be amply recompensed by the extra travellers attracted to Old Passage. The Post Office liked the idea of being able to offer the inhabitants of Chepstow a chance to answer their London letters on the day they received them - if they responded quickly.



The total distance travelled by the Chalford-Chepstow branch mailcoach was a fraction over 30 miles. A total time of 4 hours 21 minutes was allowed for the journey with just 20 minutes at Old Passage. It was not a success and the irregularity of the arrival at Chepstow made the opportunity of a same-day reply to London letters more theoretical than practical. In January 1829, the contractor announced that he was unwilling to work the coach beyond Wotton under Edge. At the same time, the directors of the Old Passage Ferry Association pursued a claim they had begun in October 1828 for some payment from the Post Office for taking the coachman, guard and mailbags across Old Passage - the passengers had paid the regular fare. The directors claimed that the Post Office allowed the proprietors of New Passage £150 a year and said they would be fully satisfied to receive £100 a year, noting that "a proper boat and men have been provided at a very considerable expense and kept up for the purpose of this mail". Such an allowance was flatly refused by the Postmaster General so the proprietors refused to continue the service after 1st February 1829. They claimed that passage money (i.e. that paid by mailcoach passengers) had not averaged more than 6/- a week. This prompted Freeling to concede that, perhaps, the Post Office might retrospectively pay passage money for the guard "who would take his (mail)bags with him as any other passenger would his luggage". Nevertheless, as the contractor wished to terminate the coach at Wotton and as a substitute ride would be prohibitive when added to the £100pa passage money demanded, the branch to Chepstow ceased and the mail was once again forwarded to Bristol across New Passage.

Part 4 - On with the Old, Off with the New

The failure of the Chalford-Chepstow mailcoach in 1829 meant that Chepstow temporarily lost its facility to answer letters from London on the day they were received. Nevertheless, the introduction of a mailcoach at Old Passage, albeit for little more than two years, had a lasting effect. The map illustrated below (necessarily greatly reduced) shows how keen the proprietors of the Old Passage were to market its claimed advantages.



The competition between the two passages intensified in April 1826. The acceleration of the Bristol-Milford Haven coach in 1824 had followed a survey by Thomas Telford in 1823 of the road through South Wales to Milford and, as a consequence of that acceleration, a Mr Price of Neath Abbey proposed the use of a steam vessel at New Passage for the mail. This ship was apparently already at New Passage but, contrary to the impression given, not directly under the control of the mailcoach contractors. While it had been proved that it could cope with conditions of wind and tide that would defeat the other boats, it was not totally reliable and, instead of drawing the expected three feet of water, drew five feet. This meant that, except at high or low water, a rowing boat was needed at each shore to transfer passengers and their luggage. It is not surprising, therefore, that Mr Price was not prepared to commit himself as to how much time the steam ship might save but suggested it would attract more passengers to the contractor's and (indirectly) the Post Office's benefit, "this passage in small boats being generally dreaded". In his comments to the Postmaster General, Francis Freeling wrote:

"The mails and passengers are at present taken over in an open boat. The advantage to the correspondence of establishing the steam vessel will not, in my opinion, be very considerable. Still, as the saving of any time on this important line is an object, I am inclined to recommend that a trial of the steam vessel should be made for one year if the proprietors will agree to submit to our regulations and perform the service for an increase of £50 to the present allowance of £109-12-0d."

Erratum: There was a transcription error in the caption of the illustration at the end of Part 2 on page 13 of the previous 'Midland Mail' i.e. 85/13. The date of 'June 1787' should have read 'August 1787'. It had been intended that the Bristol-Milford mailcoach would begin on 5th July 1787 but, in the event, the start was delayed until 6th August. Since the early parts of this article were prepared, an extract from a letter written at Waterford on 25th June 1787 has come to light. It is well worth quoting:

"By a gentleman who arrived in the Dorset packet from Milford Haven on the 20th last, we are informed that he saw at the New Passage last Tuesday Mr Palmer, the Comptroller General of the English Post Office, in company with Captain Thomas Owen of this city, Mr Calvert of Swansea, and Mr Bradley of Cardiff, who had that day signed contracts for conveying the mail by coaches from London, through Bath and Bristol, and over the New Passage through Swansea to Milford haven and back six times in the week, which is to commence on 5th of July next."

That was, indeed, the intention but the start was delayed a month.

By October of the same year, a more ambitious counter-proposal was received from the directors of the Old Passage Ferry Association. They claimed that they, too, would introduce a steam vessel and that the construction of new piers at Old Passage to accommodate it was nearly complete. Furthermore, they had fully appreciated that Telford's survey of the South Wales Road had, as its principal objective, sufficient acceleration of the mail to permit an assured day passage of the mail packet between Milford Haven and Ireland. The Directors claimed that this objective was "impeded by the delay of the bags forwarded through Bristol to Carmarthen". Their proposed solution was to intercept the London bags for South Wales at Chippenham and to send them, by means of a ride or mail cart, through Chipping Sodbury to Old Passage. At the same time, the existing Chester-Shrewsbury-Hereford mail-coach would be extended to Bristol through Monmouth and Chepstow - also across Old Passage, of course. It was said that the Duke of Beaufort (at Badminton) and

other notables approved of their scheme. The Duke's enthusiasm is not remarkable: he was one of three joint owners of the Old Passage ferry and quite probably had the major financial interest in it. The new scheme not only brought a mailcoach to Old Passage and, by implication, removed the need for one to cross the river at New Passage but greatly improved the postal service at Chepstow and in important parts of Gloucestershire. Again, the Duke of Beaufort would be a beneficiary as the Badminton estate lies a few miles from Chipping Sodbury. Unfortunately, as the surveyor's careful analysis of their proposals revealed, it took no account of the letters between South Wales and Ireland and disadvantaged many towns that were more important than Chepstow. While Francis Freeling recommended rejection of this scheme, he was careful to note that "Mr Johnson intimates that Old Passage, when improved may hereafter profitably become available to some of the arrangements of the (Post) Office".

The idea of sending the London letters from Chippenham to Old Passage was to be considered again eight years later, in 1834, and, although the extension of the Chester-Shrewsbury-Hereford coach to Bristol was rejected in 1826, it may have sown the seeds for a new proposal for, on 12th September 1831, a new Bristol-Liverpool mailcoach was introduced on a line through Chepstow, Monmouth, Hereford and Ludlow. This achieved many of the objectives of the earlier scheme, most notably that it crossed the Severn at Old Passage. Thus, a little more than two years after the ill-fated Chalford-Chepstow coach was stopped, Old Passage had the prestige of a mailcoach again. It brought notable benefits to towns such as Leominster and Hereford, particularly in respect of their letters to the north and to the south-west.

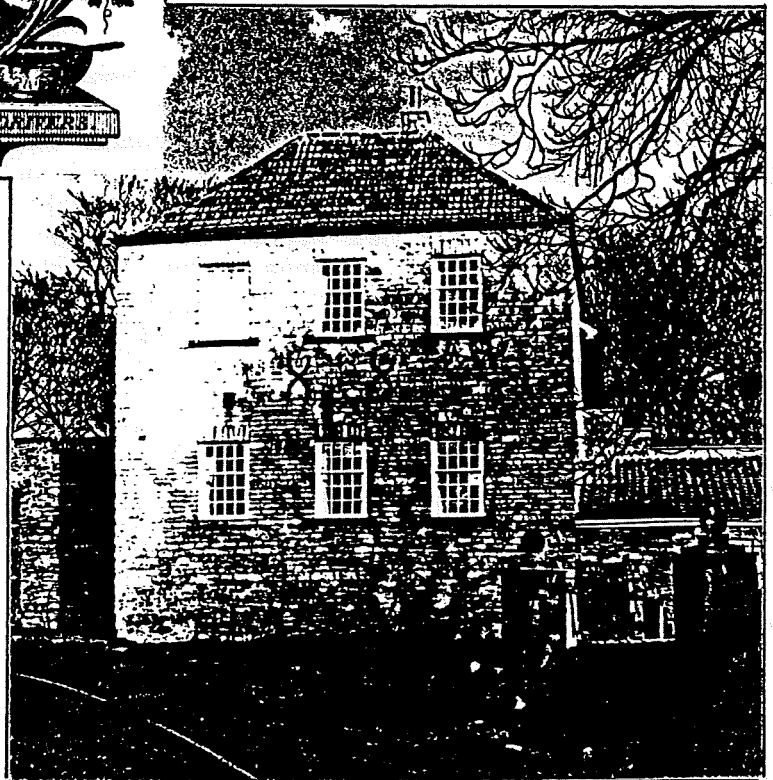
Although the proprietors of Old Passage still demanded £100 a year to convey the guard and mailbags of the Bristol-Liverpool mailcoach across the river, as they had when the Chalford-Chepstow coach was discontinued, the Post Office initially offered only £60. After protracted negotiation, it was agreed that £100 would be paid on the clear understanding that bags and passengers would always be sent across on the new steam vessel whenever it could make a landing at the piers (except, that is, on Sundays when the ship never worked). To make a successful landing, ten feet of water were required at the pier and, more often than not, this could be achieved. However, during the following years, there were persistent complaints that the steam vessel was rarely used to convey the mails but was made available to casual passengers who, to add insult to injury, were charged 9d for the crossing when mailcoach passengers were charged 1/-. It was claimed that many gentlemen of Bristol and Liverpool, believing they were to be conveyed across Old Passage in a modern steamboat, found they had been deceived and were, in the words of an inspector's report, "conveyed across the Severn in an open boat nearly every time they have to cross and . . . received a good wetting". Representations were made to the ferry proprietors who promised to do everything that could be done to remedy the situation. It only became clear at a later date that their promises meant nothing. In 1834, the same inspector from the Mail Coach Office described a not untypical crossing. He said the coach arrived from Liverpool at Beachley, on time, at 10.37am only to find the steam vessel on the other side of the river at Aust where it subsequently started to bring many casual passengers across. The eight mailcoach passengers, who had been travelling all night and included a lady, were loaded into an open boat. They had been out on the river about ten minutes when the wind battered the boat to such effect that the passengers became greatly alarmed and some were said to be soaked. They were, the inspector said, at peril of their lives and had vowed that not only would they never travel by the Bristol-Liverpool Mail again but would take steps to prevent their friends, throughout the kingdom, from ever doing so!

The introduction of this mailcoach had its lighter side. On 8th September 1831 Mr Henzell Gough, the vicar of Aust, wrote to say that he understood "it is intended to carry a mail by the Old Passage into Wales". He asked for a receiving house to be established at Aust - the eastern shore of the Old Passage - because bags were currently left at Rudgway and then taken to Alveston, still three miles from Aust. He added that "there is no communication but by sending a messenger but the generality of persons receive their letters by various persons hired by the post at Alveston at the expense of one penny a mile". He asked for the "Welsh Mail" (meaning the Liverpool mail) to drop a bag at Old Passage. Mr Gough, clearly not one to let the matter be forgotten, wrote again in November to press his case:

"I find upon enquiry that the whole of my parish is destitute of a post office, viz Aust, Northwick, Redwick and the Old and New Passages. I feel convinced that such an establishment would abundantly repay its own expences".



Old Passage House
- then and now.

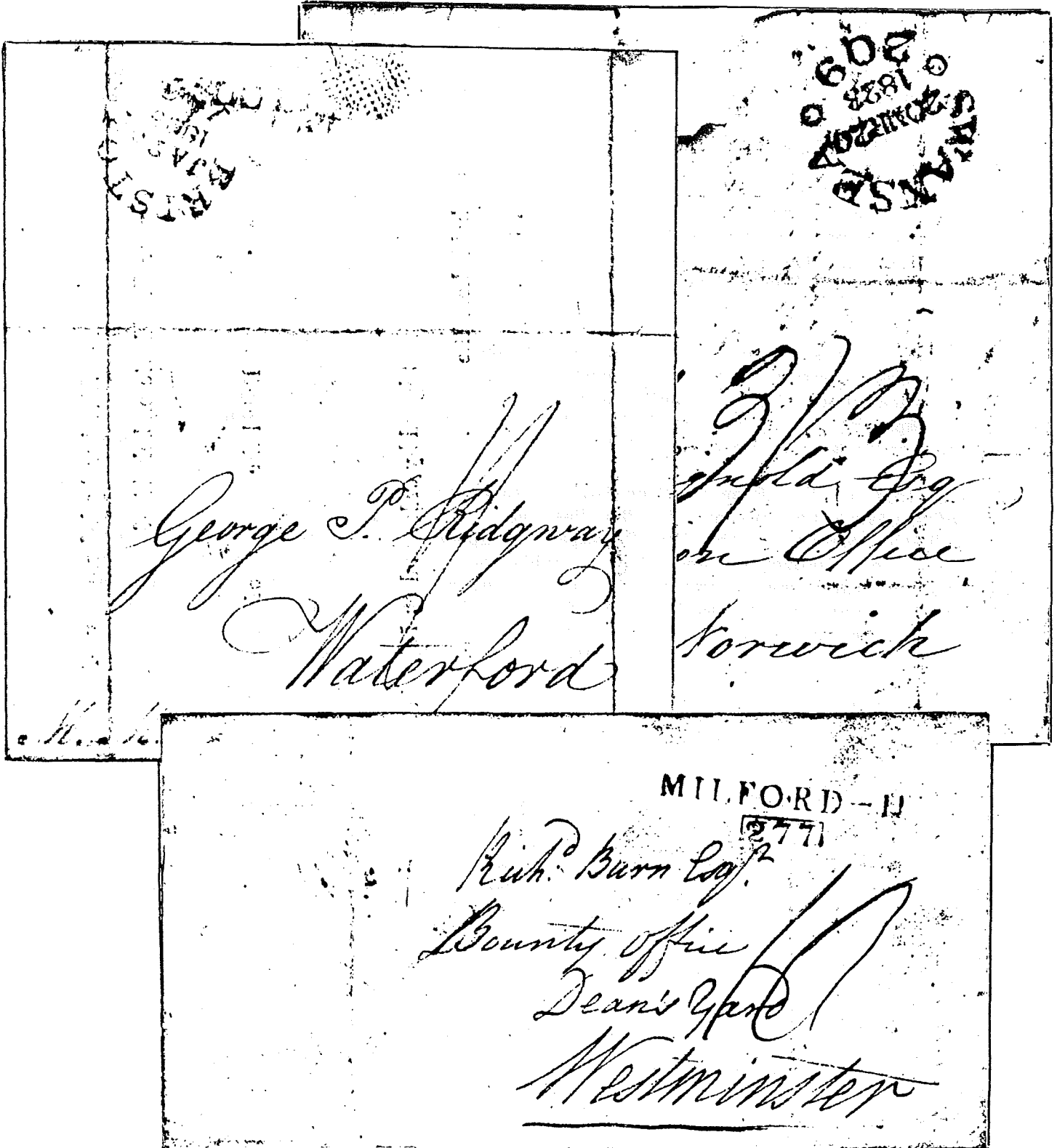


The surveyor, Mr Louis, paid a call on Mr Gough at Aust early in January 1832. He subsequently wrote to Freeling:

"I think you may be amused to find, after Mr Gough states "the whole of his parish is without a post office", he admitted to me there was no one but himself in it who he believed received one letter a month and I have no doubt that what he admitted was quite true. The establishment of a new mail to Liverpool, which

crosses the Severn at Old Passage, gives some colour to Mr Gough's application . . . I would recommend a penny post bag be sent from Bristol . . . and thereafter humbly recommend . . . a penny post receiving house at the Old Passage, the bag to be conveyed by the Bristol and Liverpool mailcoach."

The surveyor said the vicar appeared satisfied - so he might be!



Top of page to bottom: Letters (1) dated 20th March 1823 to Norwich with '209' mileage mark of Swansea; (2) 28th January 1826 from Bristol to Waterford (with 'Too Late') and (3) 10th January 1805 with the rare Milford '277' mileage of the southern mailcoach route. All crossed the River Severn at New Passage.

In 1833 and 1834, proposals were received from a Mr Lyon and Mr Vivian for changes to be made in the mails to Milford and Ireland. They included a demand for two separate mails to Swansea, a revival of the 1826 proposal to divert the London letters at Chippenham and carry them to Old Passage and the proposed re-establishment of a mailcoach from Gloucester through Newnham and Chepstow - the mailcoach route of 1785. All the proposals were said to have some disadvantages and, in January 1834, Freeling advised the Postmaster General to await the Post Office's own urgent examination of the problems rather than accede to what he described as "the suggestions and partial views of private individuals, however much they may be entitled to respect and consideration". At least there was unanimity on one key matter, best illustrated by quotations, those below from the letters of the applicants:

" . . the New Passage is a disgrace to a civilised country and (I) have been surprised that the men of property in Monmouthshire have not specially exerted themselves for its improvement."

"I have travelled on the continent in every division and I am certain that there is no government in Europe except that of the United Kingdom that would have allowed so great a thoroughfare as the (New) Passage over the Severn to remain in its present reprehensible state."

" . . . the New Passage - that disgrace to a civilised country in the 19th century."

Mr Rideout, the surveyor, added his own thoughts:

"I must confess I am not surprised at Mr Vivian being anxious to avoid the New Passage which is, of itself, a disgrace to the country and which is not likely to be improved as it is now left solely for the mails, every other coach and all private carriages preferring, although a circuit of some miles, the Old Passage."

It was left to Sir Francis Freeling to summarise the situation and to write what was effectively the epitaph for New Passage:

"With respect to the New Passage, it appears to be agreed on all hands that it is a very dangerous and objectionable point for crossing the Severn and . . during the late severe weather it has frequently been the cause of considerable delay in forwarding the mails to Milford and Ireland. I do not think it improbable that the time may arise when the Postmaster General might deem it expedient to send the mails for the south of Wales, with the correspondence for Ireland, by a new route avoiding the Severn altogether but any plan of that nature is at present far from maturity . . ."

The plan to avoid the Severn had to wait a few more years until the coming of the railways made it inevitable. In April 1835, however, the Bristol-Milford mailcoach was switched from New Passage to Old Passage, a charge of £50 being agreed for taking the bags across the ferry during the first year, again with the stipulation that the steam vessel was to be used whenever feasible. New receiving houses were opened at Cross Hands - not the place near Old Sodbury - on the east side where the road branched to Old and New Passages and at Beachley and Crick on the west side. The Gloucester-Milford Haven coach by the northern route and the coach covering the Old Passage-Milford Haven section of the southern route are listed as being patent mailcoaches in 1835. On 11th October 1836, the western terminus of both routes was transferred from Milford haven to Hobbs Point, near Pembroke. In April 1838, the Bristol-Liverpool mailcoach was abruptly discontinued, a Swansea newspaper stating that the contractor was "giving up". It seems likely that the problems were at the northern end of the line for a Bristol-Hereford coach, across Old Passage, was re-established at the end of June. However, with the Post Office now aware of the complaints from passengers about the continued use of small open boats, they fought hard to reduce the annual payment of £50 and only agreed it for six months with stringent conditions relating to the use of the steam vessel. A service was re-established from Hereford to Shrewsbury in July 1838. Also in 1838, the rides between Gloucester and Chepstow were stopped in consequence of the return of a mailcoach to that route.

Shrewsbury 23rd
 March twenty three.
 Pitt Court
 Mr Langley Post
 Office
 Thornbury
 Gloucestershire

A 'free' letter dated 23rd March 1834 from Shrewsbury to Pitt Court, near Dursley, but mis-sent to Thornbury and probably carried across Old Passage on the Liverpool-Bristol Mail.

A standard gauge railway between Birmingham and Gloucester was completed in 1840. In 1844, Gloucester was linked to Bristol by a broad gauge line and the GWR completed the London-Swindon-Gloucester link in 1845. While Gloucester became a by-word for disorder due the 'break of gauge' there, its new railways were to have an inevitable impact on the mailcoaches and the Severn crossings. In 1843, an offer by the contractors of the (now) Bristol-Pembroke mailcoach to run it from Gloucester instead of Bristol had been agreed in principle. The new service began in 1845, meeting the mail train from London at Gloucester and carrying the London letters to South Wales. At the same time, an existing stage coach was used to take the mail to and from Swansea across Old Passage.

There was an incident in 1846 when what was described as the Bristol-Chepstow Mail (probably the Bristol-Chepstow-Monmouth Mail, a truncated remnant of the old Bristol-Shrewsbury-Liverpool service) was delayed by thick fog at Old Passage. This coach was intended to connect with the mailcoach from Gloucester at Chepstow. Realising it was too late to make the connection at Chepstow, the ferry landed lower down the coast, below the Wye and nearer to New Passage, and the guard, by crossing the fields three or four miles to the main road, caught up with the coach from Gloucester at Crick.

The further development of the railways meant that mail from Bristol was only ever carried by coach as far west as Chepstow by 1850, when a new Bristol-Chepstow mailcoach was introduced, and was largely transferred to rail by 1852. From that time, neither Old nor New Passage were of much postal significance. However, New Passage did have something of a new lease of life when, in 1863, the single-line Bristol and South Wales Union Railway was built to improve access between Bristol, Newport and Cardiff. Passengers crossed the Severn by steam ferry at New Passage and re-boarded trains on the other side. The important coal trains from South Wales, unable to cross the river, continued to make a detour through Gloucester until, in 1886, the Severn Railway Tunnel, following the line of New Passage, linked the rails on each side.

(to be continued)

THE SURVEYORS' JOURNALS (Part 12)

The early part of 1803 took Mr Saverland outside the Midlands. In fact his first official business in the area was at the beginning of March when he went to Coventry to look into complaints made against the postmaster of partiality in the delivery of letters during a recent election. This he found to be untrue. He then went on to Gloucester where he spent a week considering, with Mr Woodcock, representations that had been made for more direct posts between Bristol and Shrewsbury.

For the first nine days of April, he was at Worcester investigating an allegation that bills had been taken out of a letter posted at Burton-on-Trent. He came to the conclusion that the notes had not been enclosed in the letter when posted.

Mr Saverland called at the G.P.O. in mid-April on his way to Guernsey and Jersey to "make enquiry in what manner the late Acts of Parliament respecting Ship Letters & of forwarding Letters, in sealed Bags, by Private Ships, at an half rate of Postage, had been attended to;" as well as inspecting the general business of the Post Office on each island. On his return, twelve days later, he reported that the Ship Letter Act had only in part been complied with, and that the correspondence between Jersey and Guernsey was not accounted for to the Revenue.

It is possible that this journey was responsible for the illness which then confined him to his house for about six weeks.

On 20th July, Mr Saverland left Claybrook for Shrewsbury to put on a mailcoach to Ludlow on three days a week, and open a sub-office at Church Stretton. After he had arranged for the mailcoach to start on the 26th, he left Shrewsbury on the preceding day to prepare for its reception at Church Stretton and Ludlow. There then followed a lengthy tour of inspection, lasting until near the end of August, which took in offices in Shropshire, Cheshire, Lancashire and Staffordshire. A further tour of offices in Shropshire, including the sub-offices at Coalbrookdale, Broseley and Wenlock, was made in mid-September.

Towards the end of September, Mr Saverland went to Hinckley to enquire about a letter, put into that office on 11th September for Walsall, which on arrival on the 23rd had been opened and a £10 bill stolen. Subsequent enquiries took him to Lutterworth and Lichfield.

In the meantime, he was asked by the Solicitor to go immediately to Wellingborough as a letter posted there for Wolverhampton had not been received. A £10 banknote, one of the enclosures in the letter, had been traced to a Lieutenant Kettle of the Navy, who had lodged at the post office in Wellingborough at the time of posting of the letter. Lieutenant Kettle was traced to Oxford where it was found that he had sent a box onto Salisbury. At this point, Mr Saverland returned home and we are not told how the matter was resolved.

The only official journey that he made in October was to Congleton to install a new deputy. November was spent at home in "examining rates of Postage for Towns in my District & in the usual routine of Correspondence & inspection of Time Bills."

In early December, Mr Saverland went to London to consult Freeling on a number of matters including the establishment of a 5th Clause Post from Shifnall to Coalbrookdale, Broseley and Wenlock. [This did not come into being; see the Local Posts Book p. 214.]

Mr Western began 1803 at Grantham supervising changes in the circulation and vouching. Much of the rest of the month was spent in travelling in Yorkshire. However, on his way home he called at Sheffield and Alfreton to devise a way of preventing delays to letters between Alfreton and the North.

He returned to these places at the start of February to establish a bag from Sheffield to Alfreton, and a short letter account, starting on the 5th. The next day he went to Retford where it was suspected that the deputy had altered the taxes on letters and not accounted for the postage. Mr Western took charge of the office as the deputy was suspended and then dismissed. The prosecution of the postmaster, running the office, and finding a new deputy took up much of Mr Western's time until 11th April.

His stay in Retford was followed by a month in London, broken by six days leave in Bath, discussing a wide range of matters with Freeling.

The middle of May saw him back in Alfreton to abolish the bags from Derby and Chesterfield for the Peacock Inn and consolidate the whole into one bag for Alfreton, and to introduce a messenger from the Peacock Inn to Crich.

As it had been decided to raise Retford to the status of a "regular office" on 1st June, Mr Western returned there on 24th May to instruct the new deputy in the "duties and management of a Voucher & Bye letter office Account."

The journals for June and July appear to be missing. Most of August as well as the first half of September were spent in Yorkshire and Lancashire.

It is surprising to read, in view of the earlier happenings, that Mr Western was again in Retford for four days, in the latter half of September, to report on "some suspicious circumstances of altering taxes." We are not told what his investigation revealed.

After he had attended to several matters in Lincolnshire, he went to Northampton in early October to settle the rides to Wellingborough, Higham Ferrers and Kettering so as to make it unnecessary to guard the Northampton & Wellingborough mail. From Northampton he went on to spend several weeks in Lancashire and Yorkshire.

On his way home, he called at Buxton on 13th November to take off the express ride between there and Manchester which had been put on in the autumn in the two previous years. During the month he wrote to all the deputies in his district to be more careful in their stamping of letters as a complaint had been made by the Inland Office of illegible impressions. Mr Western also sent directions "to every deputy, sub-deputy & keeper of Receiving houses under the 5th Clause of the late Act in my district that no person under sixteen years of age should be employed in any of the duties of the Post Office under the pain of the Postmaster General's heaviest displeasure, and likewise to be careful to seal the bags regularly."

On 7th December, he set out on a survey through Melton, Oakham and Uppingham during which he detected people illegally sending letters from Stamford to Uppingham. Then, towards the end of the month he went to Wirksworth to inquire about a missing letter with £9 in it and "some suspicious circumstances respecting the office there."

The lack of journals from Mr Woodcock in 1802 and 1803 is explained in an addendum to this article.

During July and August, Mr Woodcock was in South Wales. In mid-September, six days were taken up by inspecting the offices at Upton-on-Severn, Worcester, Bromyard and Bewdley as well as changing the contractors for the ride between Worcester and Leominster. Then he went to Stratford and Warwick to alter the ride between those two places to go direct rather than through Wellesbourne.

From Warwick he went to Enstone to install a new deputy. On his way to London he called at Oxford to change the contractor for, and put a guard on the Abingdon and Wantage stages.

There is nothing of relevance to the Midlands in the December journal.

ADDENDAMR WOODCOCK'S ILLNESS

On 9th May 1803, Freeling wrote to the Postmasters General:

"My Lords

I report to your Lordships the pitiable and distressing case of Mr Woodcock one of your Surveyors which I mentioned at the Board of Saturday last.

In consequence of a severe cold caught in the discharge of his public duties, a violent illness and Debility ensued which confined him to his Bed for 3 Months and to his chamber for nearly 6 Months.

Thus deprived of the advantages to be drawn from his Travelling Expences, he is a Suitor for your Lordships' consideration.

The Salary to Surveyors formerly was £400 and £350 certain, and whether those Officers were employed or not, in sickness or in health, they received this Salary without deduction but on the establishment of Mail Coaches the allowances to Surveyors were settled at £150 pr(?) [this could be "½"] year, and a certain sum per day for travelling expences to induce them to be in their Districts as much as possible, and the policy was excellent for the Surveyors knew that their Incomes must be made up by their Exertions, which I am convinced do in all cases amply repay the Revenue.

In this view of the circumstances your Lordships will see that poor Mr Woodcock languishing in a Bed of sickness and subject to a heavy expence has received at the rate of only £150 pr(?) year.

During his confinement he made every effort to keep up his correspondence with the District and to attend to the ordinary duties of it, and in two or three material regulations he gave that attention at home which he otherwise would have done abroad.

I therefore feel myself fully justified in sending the enclosed Warrant for 50 Guineas, for six Months, for your Lordships signature, and in conformity to the intention which I expressed at the last Board & which your Lordships were pleased to encourage." [Ref. Post 40/39N/1803]

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THE WARWICK POST

Mr Woodcock wrote from Warwick in September 1803:

"Dear Sir

My principal object here has been to see if any proper arrangement could be made to expedite the arrival of the Post at this town.

The sending the London bag by way of Coventry is certainly out of the question as from the early hour at which the Post leaves Coventry on its return to London, there could be no time at Warwick to answer the letters by return of Post and both Lord Warwick and the Inhabitants wd be in a worse situation than they are now. The Stratford communication is surely the best & most convenient to general correspondence. At present the road to and from Warwick is by way of Wellesborne, where the post for Keinton turns off, but I think that without any injury to the present establishment the Warwick bags may be sent by the more direct road from Stratford which is 3 miles nearer than the other, and as the rider wd not in this case be hindered by the delivery of letters on the road, it would I think bring the Post to Warwick an hour sooner than at present & will give from 4 to 5 hours to answer by return. The Wellsborne people will be served by the Keinton Post."

Mr Woodcock then went on to say that this measure would involve an extra £10 p.a. for the riding work. Fifty pounds was to be paid for the daily ride from Stratford to Kineton through Wellesborne, and forty pounds for the direct ride to Warwick. This was to commence on 10th October 1803. [Ref. Post 40/710/1803]

SHREWSBURY TO BRISTOL

In 1803, the Postmasters General received as many as six memorials asking for a new line of post from Shrewsbury through Ludlow, Hereford, Monmouth and Chepstow to Bristol.

The first, from the City and County of Hereford, the City of Bristol, and the Towns of Chepstow & Monmouth, said that letters, sent by the circuitous route through Gloucester, were subject to delay. Letters between Bristol and Hereford often took three or four days. The petitioners asked for a mailcoach, or some other form of postal communication, from Hereford, through Monmouth and Chepstow, and over the Old Passage to Bristol.

The second, another from the City and County of Hereford complained of the circuitous nature of the post from Hereford to Ludlow and Shrewsbury, and asked for a direct post through Leominster, Ludlow and Church Stretton.

A similar request was made in each of the other four petitions from Ludlow, Church Stretton, Shrewsbury, and "certain inhabitants of Salop."

Messrs Saverland and Woodcock reported jointly in March 1803:

"To the representation from Bristol, Chepstow, Monmouth and Hereford, we beg to state that Letters are neither three or four days on the road from Bristol to Hereford, or subject to delay, or uncertainty, for, a Letter leaving Bristol any day in the week at 7 o'Clock in the evening, is delivered at Hereford between 6 and 8 o'Clock the following evening; and leaving Hereford at 8 o'Clock in the morning, arrives at Bristol at 7 o'Clock the following morning. There is also a daily Post between Chepstow & Bristol, over the new Passage, and Letters for Hereford are conveyed by way of Bristol in exactly the same way as between Bristol & Hereford. There is a three days Post between Chepstow & Monmouth, and from Monmouth, through Ross, to Hereford, but owing to the Carmarthen Mail Coach leaving Monmouth on Tuesday mornings before the post from Chepstow arrives, the communication between Chepstow &

Ross is, owing to this circumstance, only twice a Week, without they were to be sent by the circuitous route of Gloucester. (this must be the complaint of three or four days on the road) And as no arrangement of the Carmarthen Mail Coach, or of the post from Bristol to Brecon can be made to meet the inconvenience of this delay, we think it right to propose a fourth days Post between Monmouth & Ross, 10 miles, at an expence of about £15 a year, as the Rider must wait all night at Monmouth, to fall in with, & connect the Posts on both lines of Road; and this small arrangement being consented to by their Lordships, The Postmaster General, removes in our opinion all real causes of complaint.

To the second representation for a Post between Hereford, Leominster, Ludlow & Shrewsbury, we have to state, that there is already a three days direct Post, from Hereford, through Leominster to Ludlow, and on the other three days of the week, letters are forwarded from Hereford to Leominster & Ludlow by the way of Worcester, the Post from Worcester to Leominster being daily. And here we beg to observe that the Correspondence between Hereford, Leominster & Ludlow is too inconsiderable for us to recommend any increase to the present establishment by direct Post. From Ludlow, to Shrewsbury, the only Post communication by way of Worcester & Birmingham, is certainly very circuitous, but the conveyance is daily, and a Letter leaving Shrewsbury at 6 o'Clock in the morning is delivered at Ludlow the next evening & vice versa. There is however an inconvenience & delay to the correspondence of two towns of the consideration of Ludlow & Shrewsbury, in the same County, not having the means of a more direct communication, but the correspondence is very inconsiderable, and the letters to Church Stretton do not exceed £40 a year. We therefore could not think of recommending any establishment between Ludlow & Shrewsbury, if it were not for the circumstance of both places being in the same county. We believe the inconvenience & delay, at some periods, must be greatly distressing, for the want of a direct communication with the County Town, particularly at & about the Assizes, upon which we recommend a communication being opened between Shrewsbury & Ludlow three days a week, by means of the Coach from Shrewsbury, through Church Stretton & Ludlow to Hereford, if the Proprietors will agree to convey the Bags for the Turnpikes only. And this we think is all the accommodation that can be afforded, consitent with a due regard to the Revenue...

Taking the Representations collectively, they go to the establishment of a new & more direct line of Posts from Bristol to Shrewsbury, nearer by about 27 miles, than the present line from Bristol, by way of Birmingham, which if carried into effect would not materially accelerate the correspondence of the Country & certainly not at all the correspondence of Bristol & Shrewsbury."

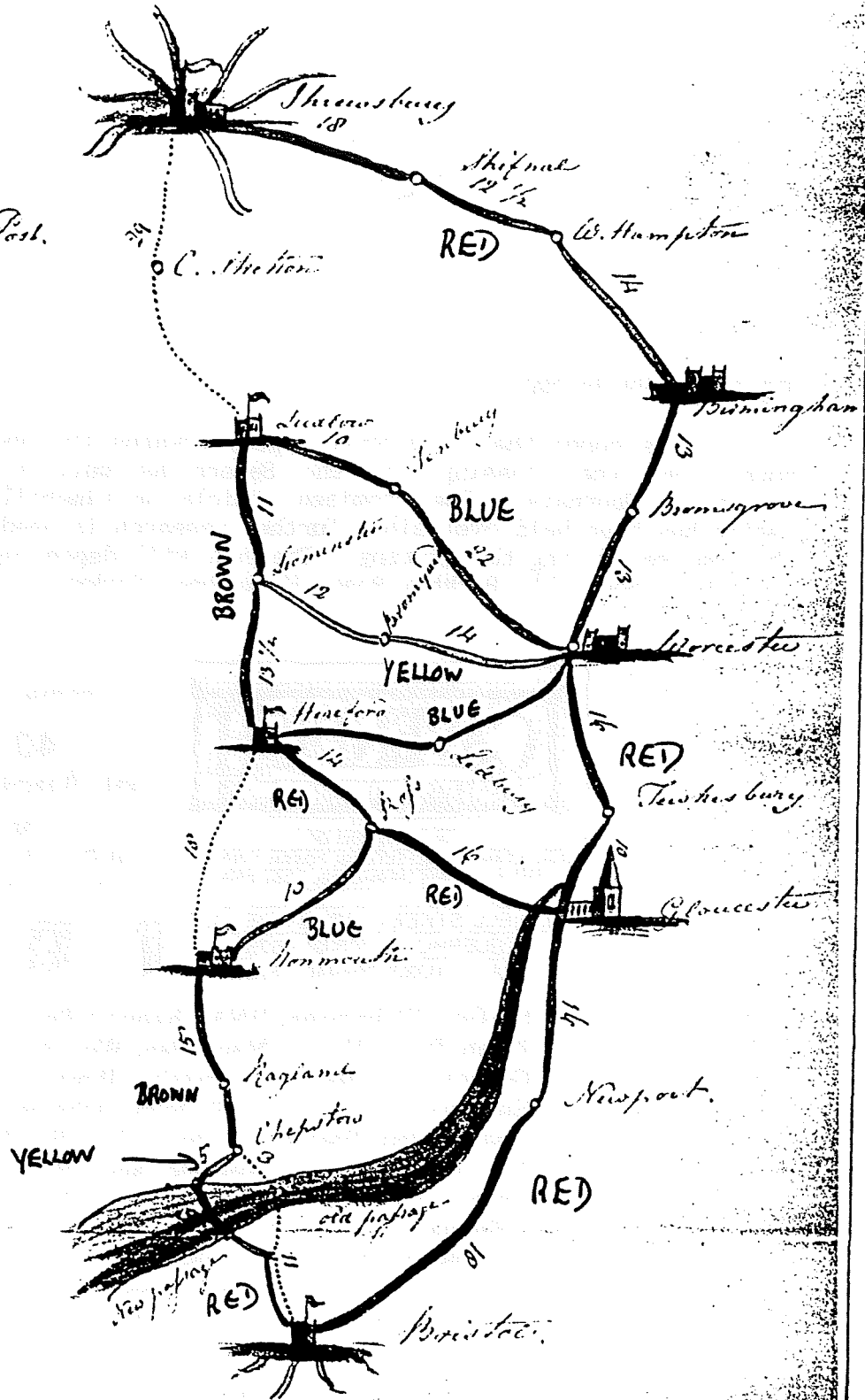
They went on to show that the petitions had been organised by the proprietors of a newly introduced coach between Bristol and Hereford.

I have purchased a colour photograph of the delightful sketch map which was enclosed with this report. One of our members is able to obtain colour photocopies for £1. If you would like one please let me know by 31st August. Your copy can then be collected at either the September or October meeting.

(Ref. Post 40/57M/1803)

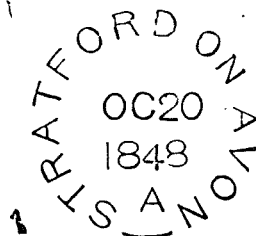
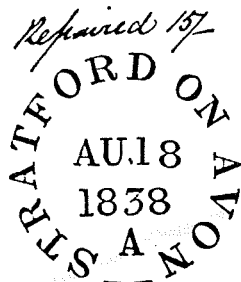
Explanation

Red.... H. C. Daily
 Blue... H. C. 3 Days.
 Yellow... H. P. Daily
 Brown... H. P. 3 days.
 dotted lines. proposed Post.



A STRATFORD DATESTAMP

My eye was caught by the inscription above the Stratford datestamp that it had been repaired at a cost of 15/-. Ten years later it appears that the serifs were removed from the letters.

THE NEXT MIDLAND MAIL

It is hoped that this will appear towards the end of October. There will be more about the crossings of the Severn as well as further extracts from the Surveyors' Journals. The promised article on timebills from the southeast of our region has been held over since further research is needed to tie up a few loose ends that emerged during the writing. The rest will depend upon what is sent to:

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



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