MIDLAND MAIL

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

President: John Soer

Chairman:
Roger Broomfield

Treasurer:
Elizabeth Lewis

Secretary:
Eric Lewis

Number 100, June 1997

A MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRMAN

So here we are, 'Midland Mail 100'. A not inconsiderable landmark as anyone will admit. MM1 made its appearance long before I was associated with the Society, and probably before my interest in postal history, and that of Herefordshire in particular, had crystallised. It just goes to show that you can teach an old dog new tricks, for this Society and its members have taught me an enormous amount about our subject - the Postal History of the Midland Counties.

Much of the information I now have filed in my little grey cells (as well as in several fairly large box files!) has come from 'Midland Mail' (the aforementioned files contain not a few copies of MM!), and it is to my shame that I have not submitted more articles to the Editors of our journal.

We, the members of the Society, owe a very great deal to those individuals who have over the last ninety-nine editions put in a huge amount of time and effort in preparing 'Midland Mail', and it gives me great pleasure to thank them publicly for their efforts, and to thank the Editor who has now produced edition number one hundred, and who will, I trust produce many more.

The Society has recently been honoured for its efforts in the field of postal history research - I will not elaborate on this except to say that I am sure that the vehicle of 'Midland Mail' must have contributed, if indirectly, to this. Our books are well known are well known; 'Midland Mail', our other publication, deserves greater fame. I believe that it merits all the praise it is given and more. Roll on MM200, and thank you, Editors past and present - you have done a grand job.

NEW MEMBER

We welcome The Black Country Living Museum who have taken up affiliated membership. They are considering incorporating a post office counter within a typical village shop of the 1900 to 1920 period.

CHANGE OF ADDRESS

Ken Smith who researches and publishes information on the opening, locations and status of post offices wishes that we include his new address and telephone number which are:

3, St. Agatha's Close, Pershore, Worcestershire WR10 1DQ. Tel. 01386-555705

THE NEXT MEETING

The programme for next season will be distributed with the next issue of Midland Mail. In the meantime, please make a note that the first meeting of the season will be on 20th September at Carrs Lane and will be devoted to nine sheet displays from members on the theme 'Some of my best Finds or recent Acquisitions'.

Other meetings this year will be held on 18th October, 29th November and 13th December.

THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Our Chairman, Roger Broomfield, began his report by thanking the officers of the Society and the Coordinating Editor for their hard work. He went on to say that we had increased our membership and provided a very good programme of meetings the highlight of which had been the meeting at Cranham. The past year had also seen the reproduction of the postal map for which the world of postal history in general owes a great debt to John Calladine.

Elizabeth Lewis then took the meeting through the annual accounts. The income was up because of increased subscriptions, though the receipts from the auction were down. On the expenses side, the charge for the hire of rooms had gone up but the cost of printing Midland Mail had gone down. The apparent deficit for the year was caused by the cost of printing the maps of which not many had been sold at the time the accounts were drawn up. Since then, most of them had been sold.

The Editor thanked the members for their tolerance of the mistakes that always seem to occur and made his annual plea for articles. He finished by saying that he was prepared to continue in the post for another year or so but if any member had the ambition of editing Midland Mail he would willingly stand aside.

Our Coordinating Editor, John Calladine, reported that sales of the map had gone well, resulting in a significant profit for the Society. He had received a number of nice letters thanking the Society for publishing the map. He then went on to discuss the Rowland Hill award and finished by saying that we must not rest on our laurels but ensure that the result of our next project would be even better.

Tom Poynton, our M.P.F. and A.B.P.S. representative, reported that Eric and Elizabeth had provided a well received display of Midlands Postal History at the Festival of Cultures in Aston last July. A judging seminar had been held last October in Burton, and it was hoped to appoint more judges from the Midlands. He then went on to give information about Midpex which has been organised by a number of specialist societies and the M.P.F.

We then proceeded to the election of Officers and County Editors all of whom were re-elected.

Our Treasurer proposed that the annual subscription be unchanged at £7.50. This was approved unanimously.

John Calladine reported on the Severn Valley Railway project. The railway company was to be asked to clarify the position regarding the sorting carriage. He went then went on to discuss the mail routes and mileage marks project. When the requisite information had been provided by the County Editors it would be decided how to proceed further.

Eric Lewis outlined the programme for 1997-8. This will be distributed with the next issue of Midland Mail.

The matter of the Society Rules was raised. These had not been ready to distribute with the last Midland Mail as had been hoped but would go out with the next issue.

The President then asked the Secretary to minute the appreciation of the Society for all the work of John Calladine in enabling the receipt of the Rowland Hill Award and the publication of the postal map.

The A.G.M. was then concluded by the presentation of the trophies to the winners of our annual competitions. These were:

pre-1840 competition	Elizabeth Lewis;
post-1840 competition	Martin Scroggs;
post-1940 competition	David Hardwick and Alan Godfrey;
Jon Baker Rose Bowl	Brian Atkins.

AUCTION REALISATIONS

The realisations in the auction which followed the A.G.M. are listed below.

A	7.00	B	0.50	C	0.50	D	2.20	E	3.00
F	4.00	G	2.50	H	3.00	J	2.50	L	1.00
M	2.00	N	5.50	O	3.00	P	3.00	Q	0.75
R	1.75	S	1.00	T	3.20	U	2.60	V	6.00
1	8.00	4	4.00	5	2.00	6	13.00	7	8.00
8	4.00	10	10.00	11	3.20	12	4.50	13	6.00
14	3.00	15	1.20	16	3.70	17	7.50	18	5.50
19	0.80	20	5.50	21	4.80	22	15.00	23	18.00
24	4.00	25	5.00	26	5.50	28	5.25	29	10.00
30	8.50	31	4.20	32	10.50	33	15.00	34	100.00
35	5.00	36	6.50	37	1.25	38	1.75	39	5.25
40	7.50	41	10.00	42	8.00	43	5.50	44	5.00
45	3.20	46	1.00	47	1.50	48	4.00	49	12.00
50	5.75	51	3.75	52	1.60	53	1.75	54	4.00
55	8.00	56	2.75	57	5.50	58	1.60	59	1.00
61	4.00	62	4.60	64	1.90	67	1.40	69	4.50
70	3.75	71	16.00	72	5.75	73	10.50	74	8.00
75	11.00	76	31.00	78	2.20	80	12.50	81	1.00
82	2.25	84	2.00	85	1.75	89	7.50	90	4.75
91	20.00	92	3.50	93	15.00	94	15.00	96	7.50
97	6.00	98	2.40	99	0.80	100	4.25	101	1.60
104	12.50	105	4.25	106	2.25	107	2.00	109	2.80
112	3.60	113	4.50	114	9.00	117	2.25	118	1.25
119	2.60	120	1.80	124	1.00	125	1.25	126	0.75
127	0.50	128	0.50	129	2.00	130	0.50	131	0.50
133	2.00	134	3.75	135	3.75	136	4.50	138	2.00
139	2.25	140	22.00	141	3.50	142	13.00	143	8.50
144	8.50	146	48.00	147	3.75	148	32.00	149	37.50
150	5.00	151	5.25	152	3.00	153	2.50	154	2.50
155	4.00	156	7.50	157	3.00	158	5.50	159	6.50
160	10.00	161	4.75	162	4.00	163	15.00	164	21.00
165	8.00	166	11.00	168	8.50	169	35.00	170	34.00
173	6.50	174	3.00	175	3.00	176	4.00	177	6.50
178	6.50	179	3.50	180	2.20	181	1.25	182	4.00
183	5.50	184	3.75	185	3.25	186	3.25	187	1.00
188	4.00								

Our thanks are due to Richard Farman for acting as auctioneer, and to Eric and Elizabeth for their hard work before, during and after the auction. Such an event does not happen without a lot of work "behind the scenes", and it does raise a not inconsiderable sum for the Society, so keeping subscriptions down.



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A FEW NOTES ON THE 'TURN OF THE CENTURY' BIRMINGHAM NUMBERED SINGLE CIRCLE HANDSTAMPS

by Elizabeth and Eric Lewis

Having acquired a large quantity of almost weekly correspondence to a Birmingham firm covering the years 1902 to 1910, together with odd covers from 1895 bearing the same handstamps, we have compiled the following notes which may interest other members.

INDEX NUMBERS - All have index numbers in the base ranging from 2 to 63, indicating that this was a new series commencing in all probability at number 1. However, not all the numbers were present in the batch and higher numbers may of course exist.

TIME - All show the time, at first in code and later in the clear, in the upper portion of the stamp, this being the first series of handstamps used at Birmingham to include the time show the time in either form.

DATES OF USE - Although we found examples dating from 1895, the series may well have been in use prior to that date and have continued beyond 1910. No attempt has been made to search for earlier or later usages.

DIAMETERS AND INDEX NUMERAL SIZES - Diameters generally fall into three groups of approximately 20, 24 and 26 mm but do not follow any pattern, low or high numeral being found in each size but only one size stamp was produced for each numeral. The index numerals themselves vary in size, numbers 22 and 27 being particularly small and number 38 somewhat larger than most. The lettering of the word 'BIRMINGHAM' varies but is consistent for a particular numeral, again indicating that only one stamp was manufactured for each index number. The following illustrations show typical examples of the three sizes together with the abnormally small and large numerals described above.











POSSIBLE RECUT OF STAMP WITH NUMBER 32 - An unusual variation that we found was a '22' with the first digit inverted but not in the same size as the normal '22'. This abnormal could possibly be a recut of the number 32 handstamp.







Normal 22 Normal 32 The Abnormal

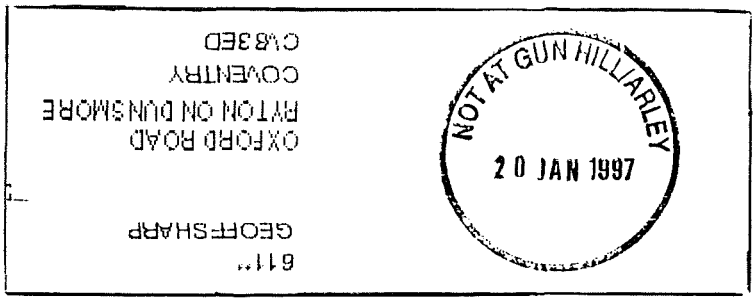
FREQUENCY OF USE - Most, if not all, of these handstamps were probably in continuous use as the various examples seen of each numeral range over quite a number of years, low numerals still being used as late as 1909.

USE OF THESE HANDSTAMPS - We have only encountered these stamps on mail coming into Birmingham and cannot recollect their being used on any outward mail. This would normally make it time consuming to assemble them in quantity as it would entail searching through material from various counties to find covers addressed to Birmingham. We were however lucky enough to come across a correspondence to Birmingham thus enabling these notes to be compiled.

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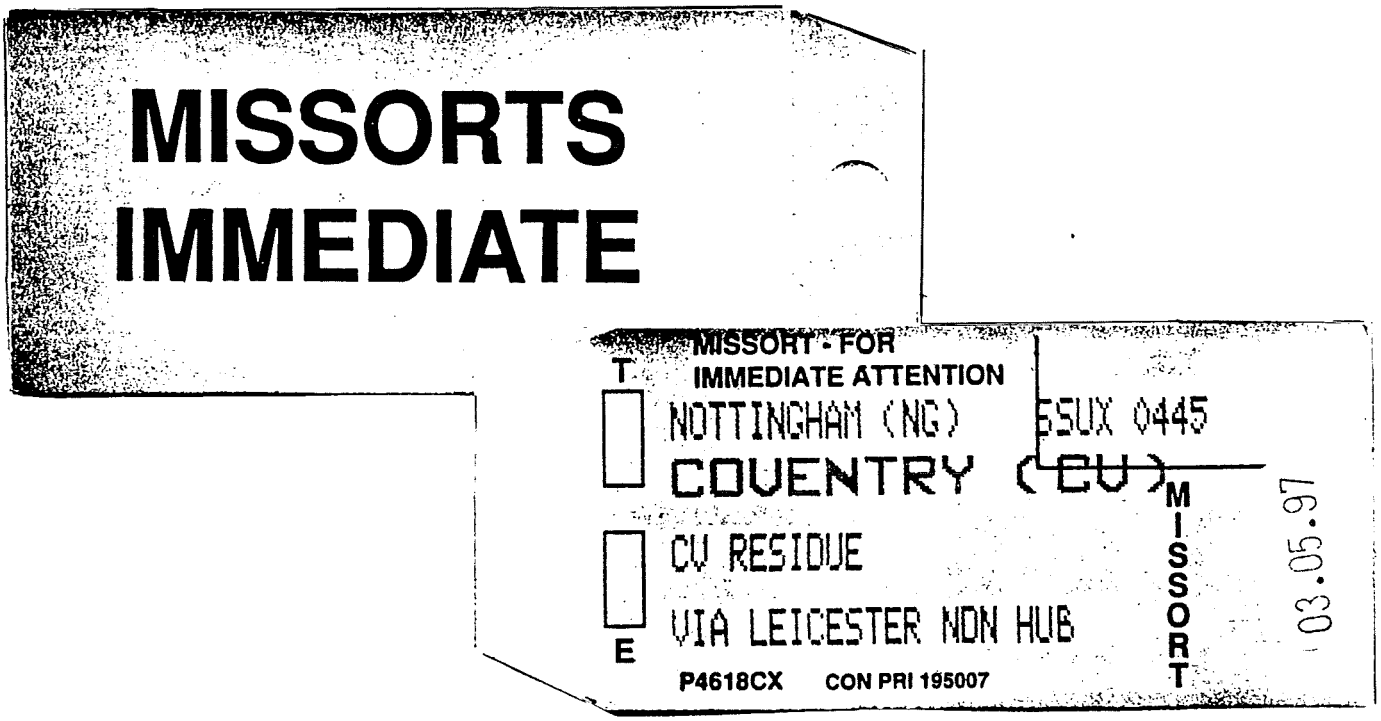
"NOT AT ..."

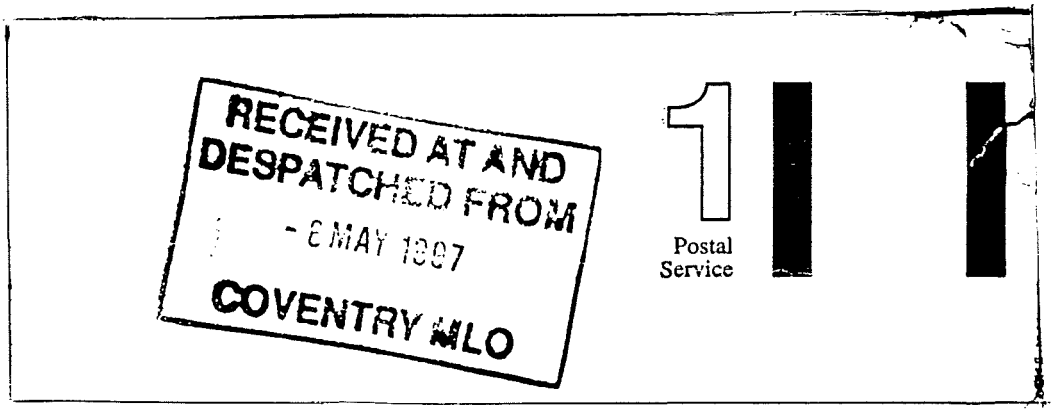
Roger Vaughan has kindly sent a copy of the unusual mark 'NOT AT GUN HILL (ARLEY)' which is shown below. This was struck on a letter addressed to Ryton-on-Dunsmore. Enquiries at the offices at Arley and Gun Hill about the reason for the use of this mark yielded only the comment that it must be held at the Sorting Office in Coventry. Roger's theory is that the letter had been mis-sorted for delivery in the area to the north of Coventry. (There is a Ryton to the east of Bedworth, whereas Ryton-on-Dunsmore is to the south of Coventry.)



Similar handstamps are known for Shilton, Meriden, Oxhill and Keresley End. Does anyone know if all the offices in the Coventry area have been issued with these handstamps.

Roger has also sent copies of a bag label and an item of mis-sorted mail which arrived at his office. The latter which had been torn in two before he could intervene but had obviously been re-addressed by Royal Mail carried the rectangular mark 'RECEIVED AT AND/DESPATCHED FROM/ /COVENTRY MLO'.





LOOSE IN WOTTON

by John Calladine

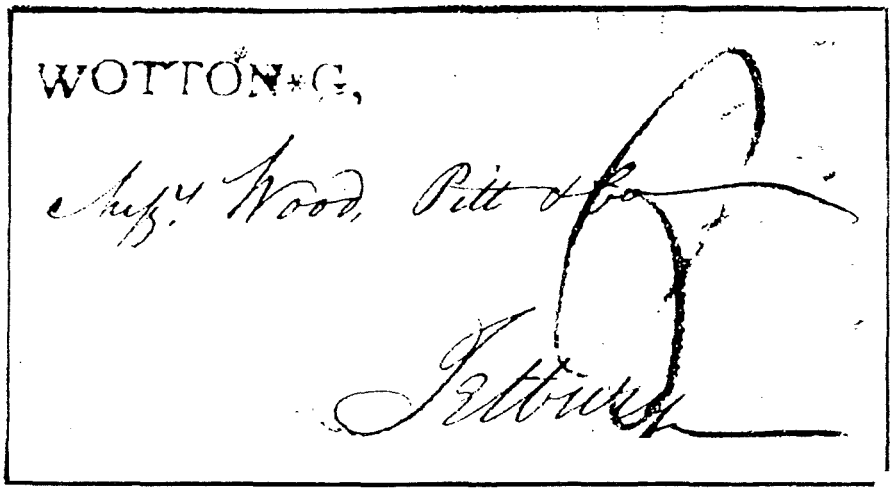
The area of 'The Cotswolds' is not easily defined. However, few would dispute that the southern boundary is reached at the small town of Wotton under Edge. The history of Wotton in inextricably linked with that of the Berkeley family, sometime resident at Berkeley Castle. Its parish church was burned down by King John's mercenaries, pillaging the Berkeley lands. It was a dispute over the ownership of Wotton Manor between the Berkeleys and Lord Lisle that resulted in the last private battle in England, the Battle of Nibley Green in 1470. It had been intended that the protagonists would settle the matter in man-to-man combat. In the event, both played safe and brought along a supporting army. It is said that Lord Lisle raised his visor to survey his troops as battle was joined. It proved to be an inopportune moment for the Berkeley's archers from the Forest of Dean let fly and, in the manner of Harold at the Battle of Hastings, Lord Lisle was struck in the face and killed. Wotton scarcely seems to have been a peaceful place.

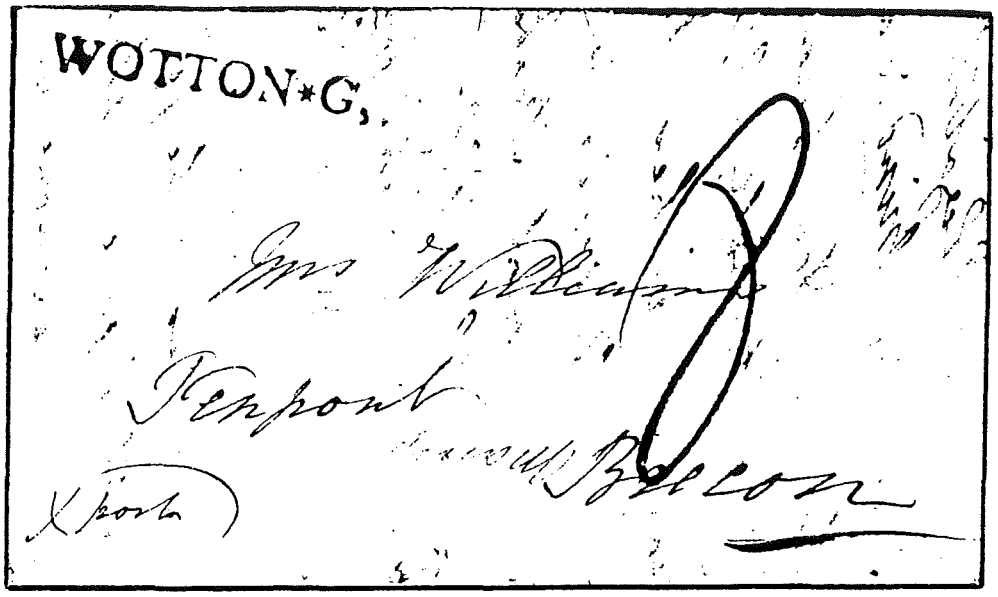
Nevertheless, Wotton under Edge prospered in the 17th and 18th centuries. As in other parts of the Cotswolds, it derived its wealth from wool. It became a noted producer of cloth, none more important than its 'Wotton Blue', as distinguished in its way as 'Stroud Scarlet'. Its importance waned in the first half of the 19th century and it is now an unpretentious town with many pleasant houses of various periods. It even has an obscure musical connection, worthy of a Trivial Pursuit question: the organ in the parish church came from St Martin-in-the-Fields in 1799 and it is the very organ that, earlier in that century, was played by the great composer, Handel.

When the first successful crosspost was established in 1696 between Exeter and Bristol, there were petitions for it to be extended, north of Bristol, to Wotton under Edge. That these petitions were heeded and the crosspost extended in 1699, before the Great Crosspost extension to Chester, was because of its importance to the woollen industry. And, while Wotton lay on none of the great post roads from London, arrangements were made from about 1690 (and possibly much earlier) for the postmaster of Cirencester to ride over to Wotton three times a week with the letters. He was paid for his trouble by a complicated formula based on the growth in the number of letters since 1692.

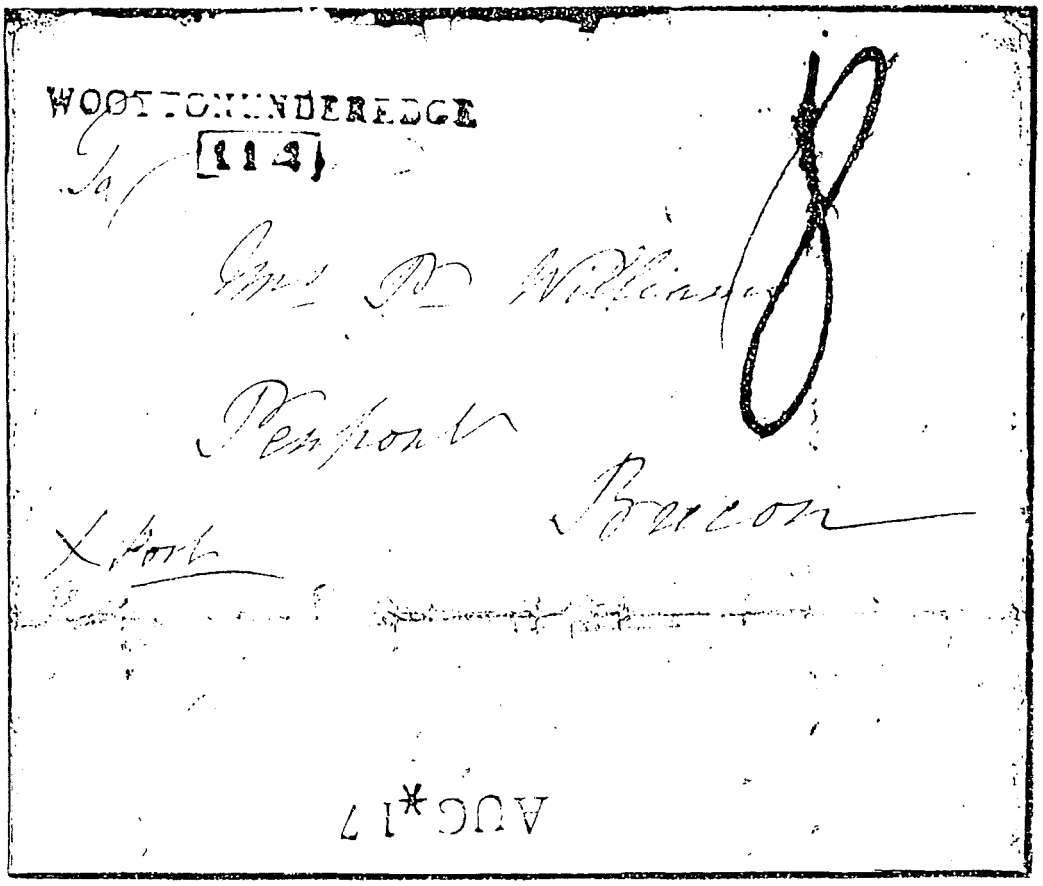
The name 'Wotton' is identical to 'Wooton' and refers to a "tun" (a homestead or village) by a wood. 'Under Edge' means "at the foot of a hill" and sometimes appears in Post Office correspondence as 'under Ridge' or, more commonly as a single word, 'Underidge'. The first known postal markings are from the 1720s and render the name as "Wootten". In the next hundred years, one can find handstamps with "Wootten", "Wootton" and "Wotton", the modern spelling. A problem with any handstamp from this town is the length of the name and it is not surprising that several of the earlier stamps were in three lines. It is more surprising that the later mileage marks attempted sixteen letters on a single line!

If a postal historian or philatelist were asked what postal marking made Wotton under Edge notable, they would surely refer to its distinctive Maltese Cross. By scoring the face of the stamp with vertical and horizontal lines, apparently using a steel file, the postmaster created a unique (and rare) cancellation. However, it is neither the Maltese Cross nor the multi-line handstamps of the 18th century that have attracted this writer's attention but two entries in the British County Catalogue of Postal History (Volume 5) that appear unrelated, those of GL917 and GL941. The former is a single line namestamp of which, it is believed, only two strikes have been recorded, one dated 1810 and the other undated. The mark is "WOTTON*G,", the 'G' indicating that it is a Gloucestershire town. The use of an asterisk, rather than a dash, is unusual, as is the irregularity of the lettering. A measurement of 43x5mm is given in the BCC with a cryptic note - "loose type?". The two recorded strikes may be compared on this and the next page.





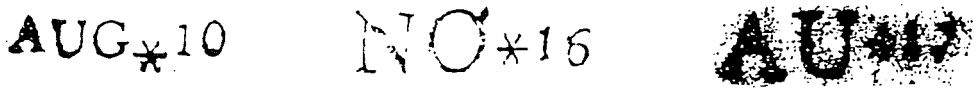
The handstamp listed as GL941 is also unusual because, rather like the well-known dated stamp of Bingham in Nottinghamshire (NG16), no two examples are the same. Like that of Bingham, it is a dated stamp but, unlike it, the date is not combined with the town's name - it is an entirely separate straight-line datestamp. Any use of this datestamp is rare and I am indebted to John Hine, our Gloucestershire County Editor, for providing a summary of recorded examples. In fact there are just four, three from 1805 and one from 1806. It seems that their use may have been restricted to crosspost letters although, by 1805/6, the Great Crosspost was no more and mailcoaches had taken over large sections of its route. One is immediately struck by the obvious fact that the datestamp was made up of loose type and, as in the "WOTTON*G," mark (just four years later) there is an asterisk. Could the namestamp and the datestamp be one and the same stamp? The BCC measurement of the datestamp, 30x8mm, seems to scotch that notion for a stamp with a height of 8mm cannot be the same as one of 5mm? There can be measurement inconsistencies but not of this order!



The Wotton datestamp (GL941) used in 1805

By chance, one of the four examples of GL941 (unrecorded at the time) turned up at Stampex in 1994. Illustrated on the previous page, it is dated 17th August (1805). Yes, the height is indeed 8mm, if measured from the top of the letters or numerals to the bottom of the misaligned asterisk, but the characters making up the stamp are basically 5mm high. This discovery changed the picture entirely.

John Hine now kindly forwarded photocopies of the other known examples, one from a 1984 auction catalogue. (Only John could lay his hand on such obscure data without hesitation!) The strike of 'AUG*10', also from 1805, is very similar and the displacement of the asterisk is also much the same. However, the other two strikes are markedly different. They are for 'NO*16' (1805) and 'AU*17' (1806). Both utilise just two letters and not three. Furthermore, these letters are now 8mm high although, by contrast, the numerals remain at 5mm. This handstamp could not have been constructed like a John Bull print set. The characters may have had a 'key' on the back, of smaller size, fitting the 'slide' of a handstamp.



Three further examples of the Wotton datestamp

Fortunately there are some direct points of comparison. The August dates contain a letter 'G', as does 'WOTTON*G,' and there is that asterisk. The asterisk can be misleading for its appearance may be drastically changed by the take-up of the ink. The number of points and their orientation are similar but one has to confess that the points of the asterisk on the datestamp look significantly longer. As for the letter 'G', it really does look very similar indeed. It is possible more than one asterisk was available.

What has been proved? To the pedantic postal historian, probably nothing at all. There must remain a possibility, even a probability, that the namestamp and the datestamp are one and the same and a near-certainty that they are from the same stable. There must be a hope that, in the future, Wotton's Maltese Cross will not be considered as the town's most notable mark but these curious loose-type handstamps. If so, this has been a worthwhile exercise.

One last point - have you been wide awake? Note the address on the second of the "WOTTON*G," covers and that on the datestamp cover. It has to be an omen.

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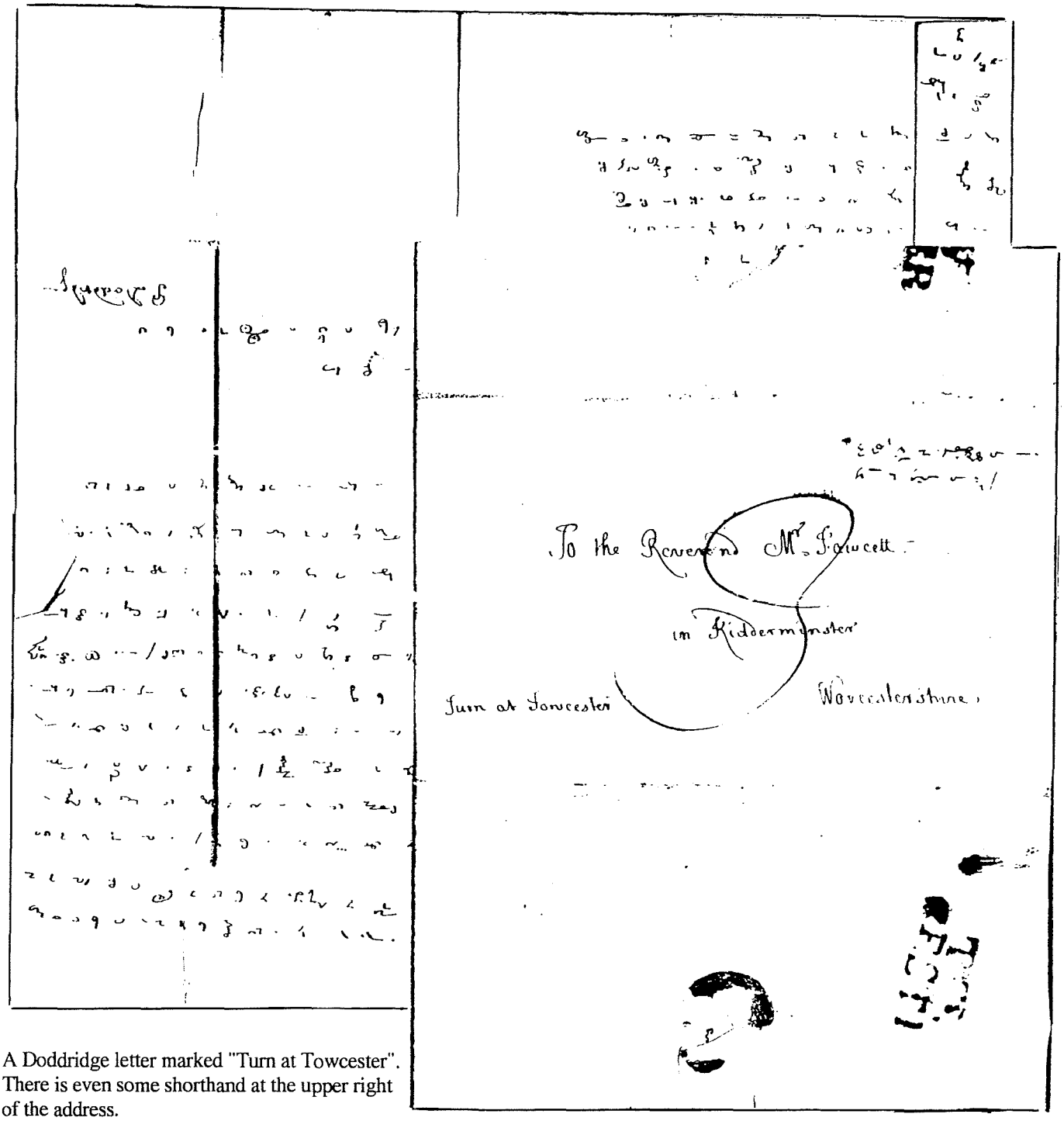
CONFORMITY AND NON-CONFORMITY IN NORTHANTS POSTAL HISTORY

by Derek Smeathers

Religion is one of those subjects which is consciously avoided at meetings of various societies - in the same way that politics can be left out of polite conversation. "Divisions of opinion are to be avoided" seems to be the attitude. Religion, like politics, can inflame the passions, cause wars, and even disrupt a society meeting! Can that be true? Whether you agree with that or not, our knowledge of the postal history of Northampton in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries owes much to religious personalities. Without studying their respective "rights or wrongs" we have a better understanding of the postal services because of the volume and quality of their correspondence.

Dr Phillip Doddridge came to Northampton in 1730, a comparitively inexperienced non-conformist minister. The next twenty-one years saw him helping in the development of the whole town, helping to govern the first hospital, helping with poor conditions in many outlying villages, establishing academies in Northampton and Daventry, and spawning large quantities of correspondence in a period when the public post was still in its infancy. Many of his letters have been catalogued, the number running into four figures, and many more remain uncatalogued. At that time, Northampton was connected with the Chester Road at Towcester by a daily horse post, and letters from Doddridge show "Turn at Towcester" on correspondence addressed to places as far apart as Shropshire and Somerset. Post coming from the North addressed to Northampton might be put off at Daventry, from where there was a connection to Northampton on only three days a week; a contemporary letter from the town to Ludlow says "please to mark your letters Turn at Towcester and I shall have it sooner".

At his Northampton Academy, Doddridge taught a form of shorthand which he encouraged every student to use not only for note-taking but also in correspondence after leaving the Academy. He himself always used it when corresponding with them. It was a form which he personally had developed from the system which Jeremiah Rich had published a hundred years earlier. In use by Doddridge, it uses long-hand only for names and was a very comprehensive shorthand. Some other systems were available at the time, but in comparision with the Doddridge shorthand they were far from complete, frequently including long-hand phrases or words. Because Doddridge was very active in forming a local military volunteer force to oppose the Young Pretender at Derby it has been suggested that he had introduced the shorthand as a sort of code, but this cannot be true as his shorthand letters are known long before the 1740s. Doddridge was strongly against the Jacobites and took an active part in national discussions on how to combat the Rebellion, with his local close associate the Earl of Halifax. Their joint success in raising a force of several hundred men may well have been the turning point in bringing an end to that campaign. Doddridge's opposition to the rebels probably sprang from his great friendship with an army officer, Colonel Gardiner who was killed at the Battle of Prestonpans. He conducted a correspondence with the Colonel and his wife and these letters to Edinburgh all show interesting postal charges via London and within Scotland. These letters were of course in his own long-hand.



A Doddridge letter marked "Turn at Towcester". There is even some shorthand at the upper right of the address.

Doddridge always produced beautiful handwriting; his addresses are clear and easy to read. It is interesting therefore that on a letter written at Thetford on a journey from Northampton to Norwich, (a letter in his usual good quality handwriting), he apologises for:- "... the badness of my writing implements which are the best this obscure inn will afford and as good as are to be expected in this wretched place ...". One might have expected that a man such as Doddridge would have carried his own pen but clearly this was not so. He may have been more self-conscious than usual as he was accompanied on that trip by the son of the family to whom he was writing, and the boy was a student at his Northampton Academy! He travelled widely throughout England, writing profusely to his wife while they were apart and occasional mention is made of the Post. Writing to Bath, he complains "... we can never get your Letters in much less than a Week". His correspondents included the Princess of Wales who wanted a copy of his book "Rise and Progress of Religion", and Count Zinzendorff, a Moravian Church preacher to whom Doddridge wrote many times in Latin. Other correspondents were in France, Amsterdam, Virginia and New York, and he ends one letter saying "... I have eight more letters to write". His wife, replying to his complaint that he hasn't heard from her, says "... this is the seventh letter we have written to Northampton. For my part, I cannot help suspecting that some persons there are so base as to intercept our letters."

There is so much of Phillip Doddridge that we might be forgiven for thinking his Non-Conformist writings made him a giant of the time in Northamptonshire. However, the Church of England produced its own successful writers of the time, some of them in Northants.

One such was Thomas Percy who became vicar of the small parish of Easton Maudit in 1753 and remained there for almost thirty years. He too published several religious writings, and his correspondence runs alongside the fascinating story of Castle Ashby, the Comptons (Earls of Northampton) and how their rise and fall affected the post. The 4th Earl was high in the echelons of military power, and in 1712 became Constable of the Tower of London. He generated so much correspondence that by 1712 a bag for "Ashby" was arriving in Northampton by every post from London. About 1730 a handstamp was issued to Castle Ashby - surely one of the smallest communities to have one so early - and this clearly resulted from the volume of letters. Not all of it was down to the Earl; Thomas Percy lived in the next village and although that village was then the property of the Earl of Sussex, Rev Percy sent his letters in the "Ashby" bag, and they are known with the handstamp CASTLE/ASHBY. It is interesting that the fine map, copies of which have recently been made available through our Society, shows Castle Ashby as one of the Post Towns or Receiving Offices established at the Expense of the Revenue, and it also shows clearly the North-South post road which passed through it. When the fortunes of the Comptons declined, in the mid-1770s, Ashby lost its postal importance to the new office at Bozeat. Later letters show an extra charge being made for delivery at Easton Maudit from Bozeat (see the Society's Local Posts Book - page 185).

Since the 1920s when Leicestershire was taken from Peterborough to form a new diocese, Northamptonshire has made up practically the whole of the diocese of Peterborough, though the city and its surrounding 'Soke' were removed from Northants in the 1970s reorganisation of the English counties. Peterborough had eight bishops guiding it through the nineteenth century and in a period of great change and development for the Post Office, their letters give an insight to the workings of the system.

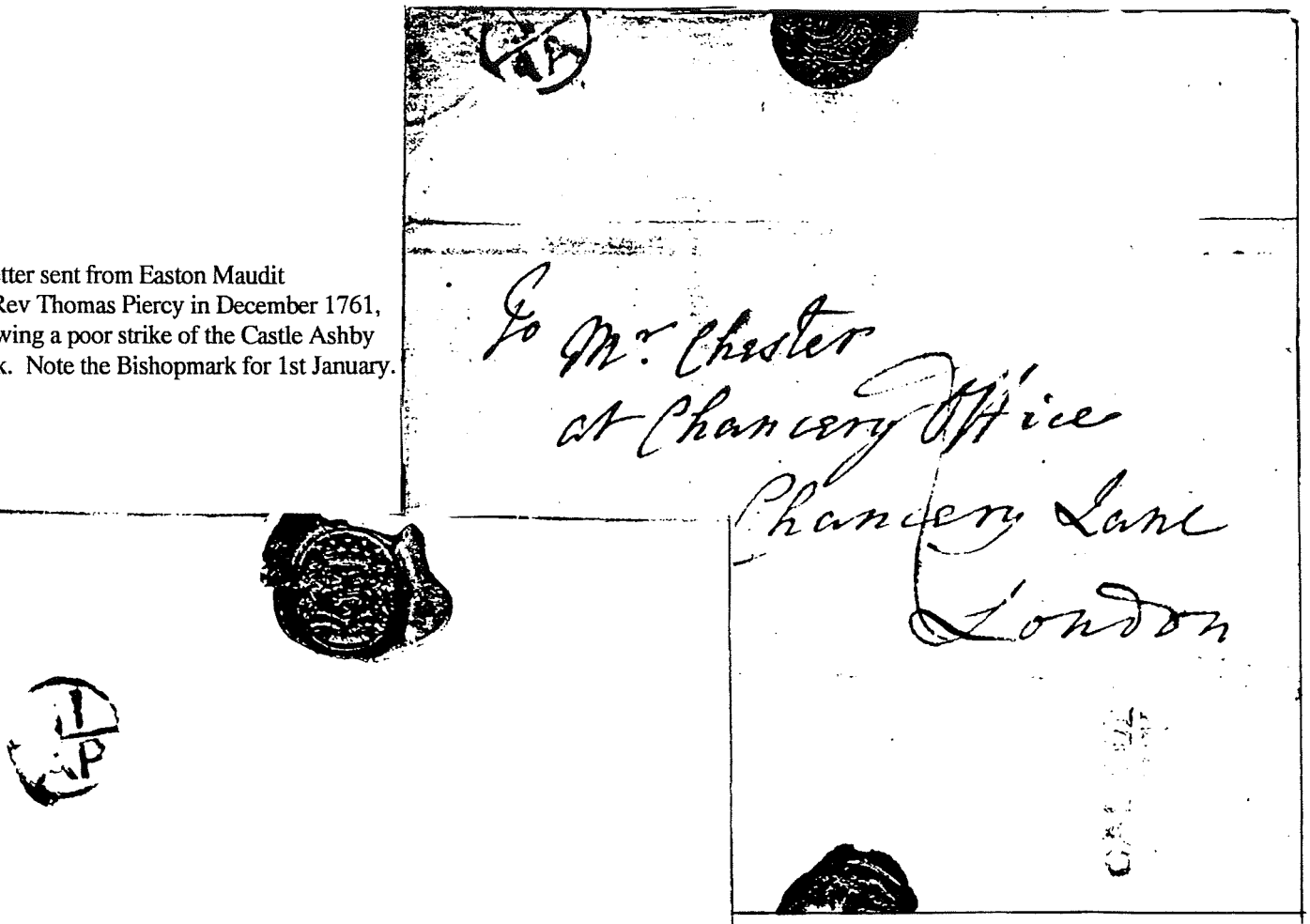
Spencer Madan was 65 years old when he became Bishop of Peterborough and has been praised for his "... cheerfulness in his piety ... and learning with humility". But he does seem to have had something of a flair for working the system, particularly with the post. A letter from him to Francis Freeling in June 1811 describes how one of his clergy had sent a letter to the bishop's agent Mr Gates instead of addressing it to the Bishop himself, so that Mr Gates had to pay the postage to receive the letter. The Bishop goes on "I flatter myself (as the enclosed paper was bona fide upon the Public Service) you will be of the opinion that this charge should be taken off, & give your directions to the Postman here accordingly." He signs himself "Spr. Peterboro".

Dr John Parsons was the next Bishop, and has been called the "Oxford Bishop" for he was born, bred, married and educated in Oxford, and indeed as Master of Balliol he was buried in the chapel of that college. A year before he died, he wrote to Freeling to complain that a letter had been opened in the post; it is perhaps worth quoting the whole of his letter:

"I deem it an Act of Public Duty to inform you that a letter addressed to a Mrs Gates 21 New Bridge Street Blackfriars, & sent under Cover to me, was put into the Post Office at Peterborough on Monday April 13th & reached me in due course, but the letter had been most improperly opened, by cutting round the Wafer with a knife, or Pair of Scissors. The Cover itself had no appearance of having been opened, the Seal being apparently in a perfect State.

I at first supposed that the Letter might possibly have been opened by the Writer of it himself, after it had been wafered, for the purpose of making some addition to it, & no suspicion of improper Conduct at the moment presented itself to my Mind. But my Friend who wrote the Letter has been with me this Morning, & he is quite sure that the Letter, when placed by him under the Cover, and put into the Post Office at Peterborough was perfectly closed, & that the Wafer was at that time untouched. How, or where, this most abominable violation of Public Confidence has taken place, or what were the particular Views of the Offender, I cannot conjecture. But I am sure that You will concur with me in the Opinion that this is a Matter which ought not to pass unnoticed."

A letter sent from Easton Maudit by Rev Thomas Piercy in December 1761, showing a poor strike of the Castle Ashby mark. Note the Bishopmark for 1st January.



A wrapper sent in 1737 by 5th Earl of Northampton to his sister.

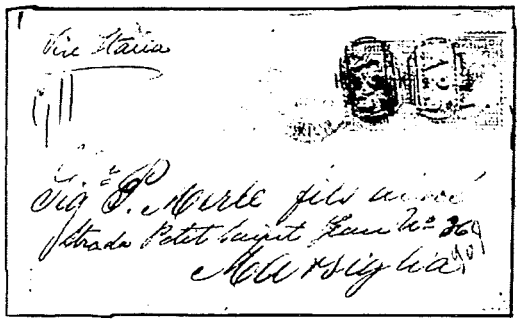
The signature is J Peterborough. The date is 21 April 1818. What transpired from this letter would make interesting reading. Was this Mrs Gates related to the Gates of Bishop Madan, and why was a letter for Mrs Gates sent to the Bishop - presumably Free? Was this point queried by Freeling, and if so what did the learned Bishop reply? How deeply did Freeling investigate?

In 1819, the then Bishop of Llandaff, Herbert Marsh, was translated to the Peterborough Diocese and became one of the best-known of all Peterborough's bishop's. He too wrote to Freeling, but on the last day as Bishop of Llandaff. His short letter gives to the Secretary a specimen of the signature he intends to use from the following day - H Peterborough - and is signed (perhaps for the last time) Herbert Llandaff. This very learned man wrote widely, and not just letters. His clergy thought of him as "un enfant terrible", establishing written examinations for them, and frequently being at odds with particular incumbents. His books and pamphlets covered ground beyond the borders of religion, and in his younger days he published, in german, a two volume 'History of the Politics of Great Britain and France'. This brought such reaction from Bonaparte, that Marsh had to be hidden by a Leipzig businessman to avoid arrest. The host's daughter Marianne was much younger than he, and the Stamford Mercury reported (many years later) that she had "...relieved the gloom of his confinement by various kindnesses and attentions". He married Marianne a few years later and she too entered the correspondence stakes - describing in one letter how it was being "... written at the Bishop's own writing table..." and praising "... the verdant meadows and pretty flowers of Peterborough". This letter is written on the same piece of paper as one from Marsh himself, and of course carried post-free.

But bishops are only human. Despite his religious fervour, Herbert Peterborough did have at least one slight failing - revealed in a letter dated November 1838 between solicitors, but which was addressed and franked with that same signature illustrated in the letter to Freeling nineteen years earlier. We must assume it was a "favour" given by the Bishop perhaps when he was not so strong, for he was by now very ill and in the last few months of his life. Herbert Marsh died in May 1839 and was buried in his cathedral, the last bishop to be buried there, and Marianne was interred beside him a few years later. We give thanks for men like him, thanks as postal historians for the information and pleasure we continue to obtain from their literary efforts of yesteryear. Without them our lives would have been the poorer.

*****

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THE SURVEYORS' JOURNALS (Part 26)

Mr Woodcock's Journal for January 1817 was very brief, recording that on the 10th he visited Cheltenham to survey the boundary of the free delivery with a view to its extension, and on the 29th he went to Presteigne to put in and instruct a new deputy. He remained in Presteigne for nearly four weeks before going home intending only to pick up some papers but was confined there for two days by "a severe fit of the stone and gravel". Then up to 8th March, Mr Woodcock was in charge of the office at Chipping Campden during the temporary suspension of the postmaster. After he had carried out that task he went on to Witney to establish a penny post between there and Bampton.

One wonders if Mr Woodcock's health was not good at this time for during the next three months he spent only five days away from home on official business, but it is possible that things were running smoothly in his district. In April he was in Cheltenham for two days looking into the situation regarding the letter carriers. For the whole of May, he was at home. At the beginning of June he was again in Cheltenham for two days, "on official business", and then towards the end of the month he was in Coleford for a day, inspecting the penny post and investigating a complaint against the receiver.

From 6th to 8th July, Mr Woodcock was in Oxford supervising the change of the Worcester mailcoach to the Uxbridge road, and looking for a contractor for the new ride from Oxford to Towcester. [No reason is given for the change of the route of the mailcoach, but possibly it can be found somewhere in the depths of Post 40.] On his way home he visited the offices at Abingdon, Wantage, Woodstock, Charlbury and Enstone. He found little worthy of report, but commented, "The Banbury Coach goes on pretty well. The Enstone P.P. varys but little." [See MM99/16 for the piece on the Woodstock-Banbury mailcoach.]

After he had been at home for a week, Mr Woodcock travelled to Birmingham to discuss with Messrs Hasker and Godby the business of the new Holyhead mailcoach. From Birmingham he travelled southwards, inspecting a number of offices on his way to Oxford. He spent twelve days in the Oxford area preparing for the ride to Towcester and attending to its introduction in early August. The latter half of August found Mr Woodcock in Malvern, inspecting the penny post and instructing a new receiver at the Wells. [Incidentally, the journal for August was Mr Woodcock's 300th.]

For three weeks from 23rd September, Mr Woodcock was in charge of the office at Dursley as the postmaster had died. However, for the remaining part of October he was at home, "much afflicted with the Rheumatism." Then, from mid-November until the end of the year, he ran the office at Bewdley as the deputy "from age and mental infirmity" appeared to be incapable of performing the duty.

On 25th January 1817, Mr Hart went to Wellingborough for his first inspection of that office in the course of which he examined "all the Lists" and corrected them where necessary. At Northampton, he found the office to be well conducted. During February and March, Mr Hart was not in the Midlands and the journal for April is missing. But at the start of May we find him in Derby instructing a new deputy, a task which appears to have taken up the whole month.

Mr Hart travelled to Chesterfield in mid-June to ask if the receiver at Dronfield could be entrusted with a penny post. The answer must have been in the affirmative for he prepared circulars ordering that letters for Dronfield addressed "near Chesterfield" should be forwarded to Sheffield, "to have the advantage of an early delivery." He then went on to Sheffield to instruct the receivers how to use the daily bills and make further preparations for the penny post which he was able to start on 23rd June.

We next find Mr Hart in the Midlands towards the end of August when he looked into the supposed non delivery of a letter which contained a number of bills and had been put into the post at Alfreton. It emerged that the addressee in Derby had failed to acknowledge receipt of the letter. The only other business that he had in the Midlands during the year was the establishment of a penny post from Newark to Newton at the start of October.

Mr Godby's first journey on official business in 1817 was to Oswestry to convert the penny post to Llanfyllin from a four-day to a six-day post. He then went to Stourbridge to prepare for the opening of a penny post to Brierley Hill. At the start of February he visited Daventry and Southam to see if it was possible to give better accommodation at the latter place by putting back the dispatch of the mail to a later hour. But on the 5th, he returned to Stourbridge as everthing was ready for him to open the penny post to Brierley Hill. The second half of the month saw Mr Godby visiting Atherstone, Ashby, Burton, Uttoxeter, Stone and Newcastle to see under what terms rides could be set up on the withdrawal of the Leicester to Liverpool mailcoach. He returned to these towns in April to make sure that all the arrangements were in place.

The fact that the postmaster of Uttoxeter was considerably in arrears took Mr Godby there for several days in June. He returned on 1st July to take charge of the office. However, he had to go to Birmingham on 20th for three days to meet Mr Hasker and the proprietors of the proposed Holyhead mailcoach. From Birmingham, he went on to Shrewsbury to arrange the additional duty needed because of the alteration to the Holyhead mail. Then at Chirk he enquired about the intentions of the contractor for the Chester to Chirk ride who had been given notice to quit, as well as informing the deputy about the proposed changes.

For most of August, Mr Godby was in North Wales and Cheshire but towards the end of the month he visited Oswestry to investigate a complaint about a delay in the delivery of letters brought by the down mail. During September, in between two visits to Uttoxeter, Mr Godby went to Coventry, Dunchurch, Rugby and Daventry to inspect those offices after the introduction of the new Holyhead mailcoach, to try to improve the post to Rugby, and to open a bye letter account between Dunchurch and Rugby. For much of November and December, Mr Godby was in charge of the Uttoxeter office.

ADDENDA

THE WEST BROMWICH RECEIVING OFFICE

In January 1817, the inhabitants of West Bromwich sent a petition to the Postmasters General in which they made the following points:

(a) West Bromwich Heath was the centre of the parish through which the Shrewsbury and Holyhead mailcoach passed each day at about noon, both up and down;
(b) the population of West Bromwich was about eight thousand;
(c) West Bromwich covered an area 4 miles by 3½ miles, and the post office was situated at the northern extremity of the parish, nearly two miles away from the "principal manufacturies" so retarding the delivery and causing much inconvenience;
(d) it would be much more convenient if the post office were moved to a part of West Bromwich Heath adjoining the turnpike road;
(e) it would be appreciated if a letter box could be provided as the receiver also delivered the letters so could not always be in the office and the penny post charge could then be made when the letter was delivered rather than when it was handed in at the office.

In his report, Mr Woodcock said that the office was in the town of West Bromwich, "properly called", where it had been as he understood for the last fifty years and in the same house. The delivery at West Bromwich was very extensive, being about six miles in length. Although it would be more convenient for those living in the area called The Heath to have the receiving house there, the inhabitants of the town where it had been for so long would have reason to complain. Also, as there was no complaint against the deputy it would be difficult to justify asking him to move his house or give up his position. He added that it was very proper that a receiving box for letters should be opened, and he had given an order to that effect; the fact that there was not one was "in conformity to a long established custom."

Members might like to refer to articles in MM52/14 and MM53/9. [Ref: Post 40/21/1817]

AN EXTRA CHARGE AT MALVERN WELLS

A Mr Wigram complained to Freeling in August 1817 that an extra twopence had been charged on all his letters sent to and from Malvern Wells. As Malvern and the Wells had been brought into the Penny Post all the letters should have been delivered for the General Post charge plus the penny postage, Freeling asked Mr Woodcock to make enquiries. Mr Woodcock replied that the receiver had been warned not to make any extra charge but was "refractory". When Mr Woodcock went to Malvern to question the receiver, a Mr Steers, he (Mr Steers) said that the charge of a further penny had been an established custom ever since had kept the house, and that he had never claimed it as a right but as "the voluntary offering of the visitors for his care and attention to their correspondence."

Mr Woodcock said that the penny post revenue had always been accounted for so no fraud was intended. So it was not appropriate to prosecute Mr Steers but he should be dismissed from the position of receiver. The reaction of Mr Steers was to demand £40 p.a. for carrying the letters from Great Malvern and delivering them. Consequently, Mr Woodcock sought a replacement which he found was not an easy task, "in such a place as the Wells...". Eventually he prevailed upon a Mr Essington, "the Master of the other Hotel", to undertake it for £25 p.a. for which he was "to provide a Messenger to go to Great Malvern, daily in the summer and 3 times a week in Winter and to deliver letters round the neighbourhood."

[Ref: Post 40/211/1817]

THE ROCKINGHAM POST OFFICE

The postmistress of Rockingham, Margaret Hunter, wrote to Freeling in July 1817:

"I am sorry to trouble you with these few lines but am under the necessity of so doing having been used very ill by a person who (h)as tooke my House and business over my head unknown to me till within these last few days. And my Landlord insists upon my leaving next Michaelmas and I am afraid when my effects are sold I shall be but slenderly provided for... I am very infirm and not able to be left by myself and I have now kept the Post Office for this 25 years and should be very glad if the Post Masters General would consent for me to take it to another House in the Town as it would be a very great help to me. But if I should be so unfortunate as not to get it I can't tell what I must do, but as I have hitherto given satisfaction for so many years I hope there will be no objection in my taking it to another House. ... The reason for my troubling you so soon with this Letter is I was afraid the person who is coming to the House would be applying for it as I understand he intended doing, but I think he may be contented in taking my House and land from me without wishing to rob me of a situation that would bring me in a trifle towards a Maintenance which I am afraid I shall stand in great need of and which he can do very well without..."

Mr Western said that he could not see that there was any objection to her taking the office to another house of a "proper plan", and he had never had any reason to think the business other than well done. He added that the village of Rockingham belonged to Lord Loundes who lived at the castle.

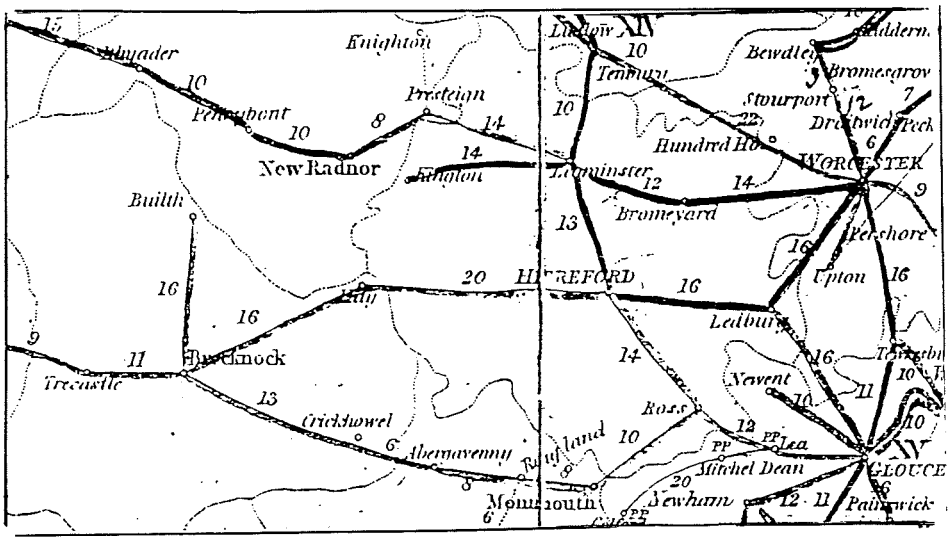
THE HEREFORD TO LEOMINSTER POST

In July 1817, Sir George Cornwall and a number of other gentlemen wrote to the Postmasters General asking for, among other things, a daily post between Hereford and Leominster to replace the three-day post.

Mr Woodcock in his report confirmed that the post between Hereford and Leominster went on three days a week but on the other four days letters were sent through Worcester. [See MM96/13.] The latter was a circuitous route for which the charge was 8d. a single letter, whereas the former was a distance of thirteen miles and the charge 4d. Mr Woodcock went on to say that although the number of letters passing between Hereford and Leominster only was very small, the bye correspondence also included letters from Breconshire charged by Hereford on Leominster and letters from Radnorshire charged by Leominster on Hereford; the three day voucher for the month ended 5th June showed the former to come to £25 and the latter £4.12.0. So to grant the request would not only improve the correspondence between those two towns and with Kington but also that between the counties of Radnor and Brecon. However, by dropping the circulation through Worcester, the postage would be decreased, but possibly the number of letters would increase. The cost of a post on the additional four days would be about £40. As a footnote he added that he felt a five or a six day post would be sufficient.

Their Lordships authorised Mr Woodcock to add as many days as he could for £30 p.a. on a trial basis for one year.

[Ref: Post 40/192/1817]



THE WITHDRAWAL OF THE LEICESTER TO LIVERPOOL MAILCOACH

In a report dated 27th February 1817, Mr Godby gave details of the arrangements he proposed for serving the towns on the route of the Leicester to Liverpool mailcoach which was to be withdrawn on 5th April.

He first listed the services which were to be discontinued: the penny posts at Tutbury and Tean (he did not intend to maintain the direct communication between Burton, Uttoxter and Cheadle as there would be no means of carrying the bags without incurring an expense that could not be met by the penny post receipts); the horsepost from Tean to Cheadle; the foot messengers from Newcastle to Longport, from Middlewich to Winsford, and from Knutsford to Bucklow Hill.

Mr Godby proposed to serve Ashby and Burton by re-establishing the horsepost from Atherstone which was to leave there immediately after the arrival of the Chester down mail. The penny post offices on the road between Atherstone and Ashby were to remain. He did comment that Burton might wish to have its London letters from Lichfield rather than Atherstone, but the objections to a previous application still existed - it gave no material advantage to Burton while depriving Ashby of its mail from the North and the road between the two towns of "all convenience".

Uttoxeter was to be served by a horsepost from Rugeley which was to leave Uttoxeter at 6a.m. to meet the up mail-coach and return in the evening with the London and bye correspondence. Mr Godby commented that Uttoxeter was the only town on the route of the mailcoach to have derived any great advantage from it. They people there would have a post once a day whereas the coach had given them two posts a day. But they would probably be satisfied by the fact that they would have an open letter box and would not have to pay the extra penny on letters in and out. (He presumed that it was not intended to re-impose that charge.)

The horsepost from Stone would be re-introduced to serve Cheadle which had not obtained any benefit at all from the coach so would probably be happier with their previous arrangement.

Mr Godby proposed to re-introduce the pre-mailcoach arrangements in the Potteries with some slight alterations to give more time for answering letters by the evening mail. He said that the Potteries would not regret the demise of the mailcoach as they would receive their London letters earlier. The morning ride from Newcastle had to continue for the letters from Liverpool and the North. It would need three men and horses for the evening rides with the mail from London etc. These would leave Newcastle thirty minutes after the dispatch of the mailcoaches with one going via Stoke and Lane Delph to Lane End, another through Etruria, Cobridge and Hanley to Shelton, and the third taking in Longport, Burslem and Tunstall. The riders were to wait at the end of their rides until 10 p.m. when they were to return by the same route "with the answers." The departure of these rides within thirty minutes of those of the mailcoaches assumed that it was not intended to resume the original method of dealing with 5th Clause Post letters which involved entering the name of every person to whom a letter was directed.

For the towns of Northwich, Middlewich and Sandbach it was proposed to re-establish the horsepost from Knutsford.

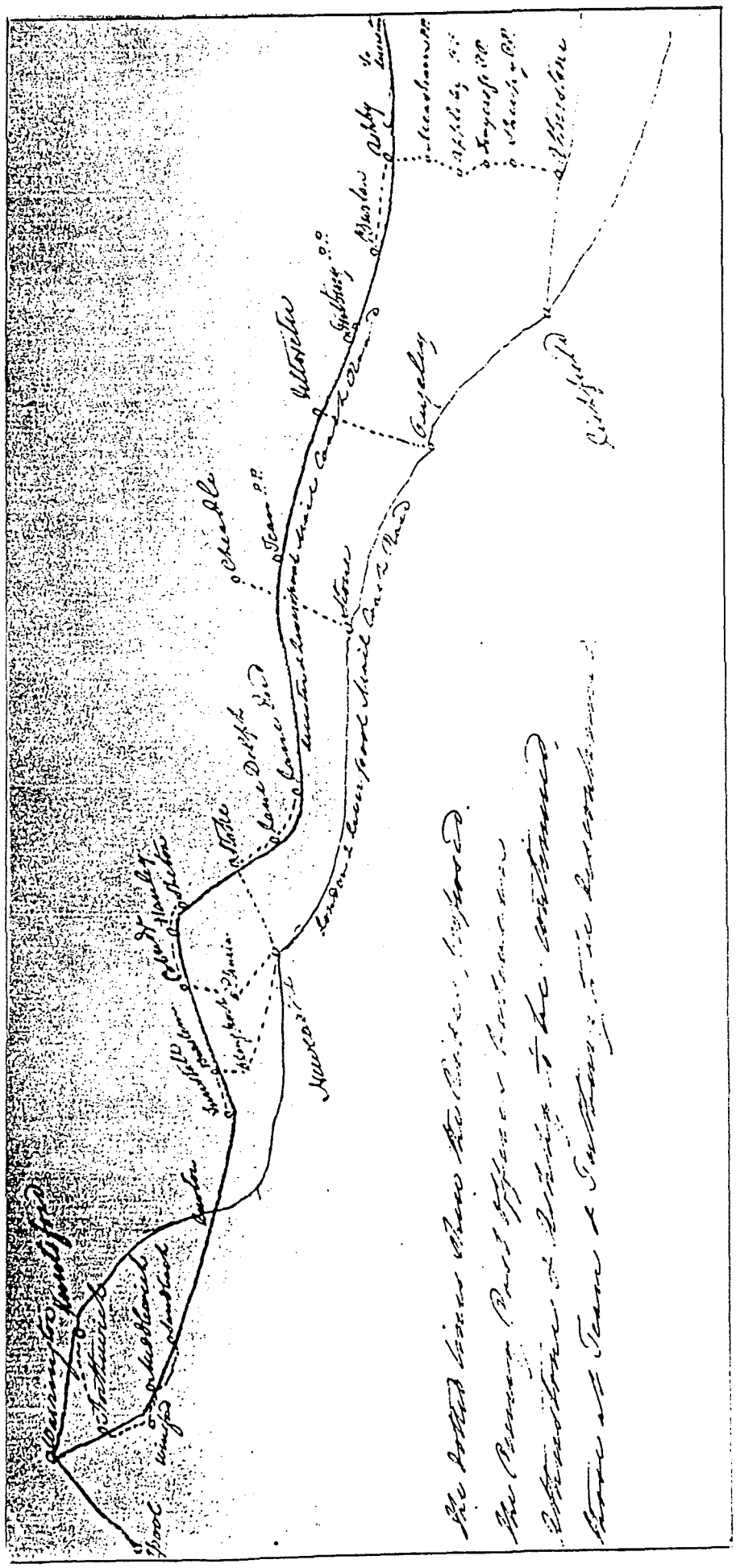
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ALTERATIONS TO RIDING WORK

This updates the information given in MM95/8-10 and MM98/15.

TIME BILLS	Miles	Armed or not	Time fixed to depart	Time fixed to come in
Mr Hart - July 1816				
Sheffield and Buxton	No details given.			
Buxton and Manchester	No details given.			
Mr Godby - January 1816				
Newcastle and Potteries	8	not	7.00 a.m.	4.30 p.m.
Atherstone and Burton on Trent	25	not	ride discontinued	
Stone and Cheadle	10	not	ride discontinued.	
Uttoxeter and Rugeley	12	not	ride discontinued.	

It is likely that these four changes took place in either October or November 1815 but have not had time to verify this.

- April 1817				
Newcastle and Lane End	5	not	6.30 p.m.	11.00 p.m.
Newcastle and Cobridge	5	not	6.30 p.m.	11.00 p.m.
Newcastle and Tunstall	5	not	6.30 p.m.	11.00 p.m.
Atherstone and Burton on Trent	25	not	12.30 p.m.	10.10 a.m.
Stone and Cheadle	10	not	6.00 p.m.	6.00 a.m.
Uttoxeter and Rugeley	12	not	6.00 a.m.	5.00 p.m.
Mr Woodcock - August 1817				
Oxford and Towcester	32	armed	11.15 p.m.	3.30 a.m.

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THE HOLYHEAD MAILCOACH OF 1817

In January 1817, the Post Office issued the following notice over the name of Francis Freeling, Secretary::

"His Majesty's Postmaster-General will receive Tenders in Writing, on or before the 31st Instant, sealed up, to Contract for One Year certain to convey His Majesty's Mails in a Mail Coach, with four Horses, every day, to and from London and Holyhead, by way of Coventry, Birmingham, and Shrewsbury, in Thirty-eight Hours each way, including all Stoppages."

What this notice does not say is that neither the Postmaster General nor Freeling were at all happy with this change in route of the mail for Ireland. This article is a brief attempt to look at some of what went on before and after that notice was published.

The first mailcoach from London to Holyhead was introduced in September 1785. Initially it ran via Coventry and Chester, but in April 1788 it was diverted to a route through Northampton, Hinckley and Stafford. It was suggested in 1805 that the time of the journey could be reduced by using the shorter route through Coventry. Although the difference in distance between the two routes was only fourteen miles, in time it was a matter of two hours. The saving of two hours was important because the time of departure from Holyhead was determined not, as might be expected by the time of arrival of the packet from Ireland, but the need to arrive in London in time for the morning delivery. The packet had often arrived after the departure of the coach, so delaying the mail by twenty-four hours. Freeling opposed any change, maintaining that the mail must go through Chester as mail from much of the North was centered on that town.

However when the matter came up again in 1808, Sir Arthur Wellesley was insistent that speeding up communication between London and Dublin must take precedence over other concerns. As a consequence, the mailcoach which ran through Oxford and Birmingham to Shrewsbury was extended to Holyhead, and was met at Llangollen by an express from Chester bringing the crosspost mail.

Nevertheless, the Irish Members of Parliament, led by Sir Henry Parnell, continued to press for an acceleration of the mails between London and Dublin. This pressure culminated in the setting up of a Select Committee on the Holyhead Roads which produced two reports in 1815.

The First Report described the state of the roads, particularly those in North Wales. William Akers, Hasker's assistant, when asked which was the best road, "in point of distance and repair", from London to Shrewsbury, replied that though he had a few doubts, he thought it was that through Coventry, and the next best was through Henley. When asked if any mailcoach ran on the road through Stratford to Shrewsbury, he said that a coach had gone as far as Banbury but the road below Aylesbury was so bad they had been forced to give it up.

The evidence given to the Committee by Freeling and Hasker in May and June 1815 is contained in Appendix No. 1 of the Second Report. Freeling said that the mailcoach carrying the Irish Mail went through Wycombe, Oxford, Birmingham and Shrewsbury to Holyhead, taking about forty-one hours for the 276 miles and returning in forty-three hours because of a stop of two hours at Shrewsbury. The distance was about ten miles further than the route through Coventry and Birmingham. When asked why the longer road was used he replied that if the Coventry route were used all the mail from London by the Wycombe Road, by the Henley Road to Oxford, Oxford itself, and a large part of the correspondence of Gloucestershire and Worcestershire for all parts below Birmingham and Ireland would be delayed twenty-four hours. When asked if this delay could be avoided by new regulations bringing that correspondence through Birmingham, he replied, "I conceive not." He did admit that the mailcoach from Bristol arrived in Birmingham in time to have letters go forward by the Holyhead mailcoach, in the event of its leaving Birmingham two hours earlier than it did then.

In response to further questions, Freeling said that it might be possible to get the mail to Holyhead an hour earlier, "...by revising our system, and by great exertion,...taking care of all the important correspondence which we must of necessity carry by it", and in the return direction to get it away an hour later.

The next person to be examined by the Committee was Thomas Hasker, Surveyor and Superintendent of Mail Coaches. After he had answered some questions on the routes which had been used between London and Chester, Hasker was asked how long the Chester mailcoach took to travel from Northampton to London. (A question no doubt prompted by the slow speed at which it travelled.) He replied:

"At present it is what we call an auxiliary coach; it arrives about seven at night at Northampton, and gets to London about six in the morning; it is just eleven hours at six miles an hour; it is a Mail Coach no farther than Dunstable. We have had a good deal of trouble with the Chester Mail Coach, in consequence of being obliged to accommodate Ireland with a

Mail Coach through Shrewsbury; it so crippled that Coach that they have never lived by their earnings since the Shrewsbury Coach was established, and about three years ago it was very near being stopped. I had a great deal of difficulty, and was obliged to have a great deal of extra work done at an extra price, in these dear times, otherwise it would have stopped in the middle of the winter, and they petitioned to have it done by what they called an auxiliary Mail Coach, which was to permit them to carry four passengers on the outside from Dunstable to the Head [Holyhead], hoping that by carrying greater numbers they should be able to augment their earnings so as to get a profit; but not succeeding. At a meeting I had at Lutterworth last Friday, they begged of the Post-master General to restore it to a Mail Coach again from London, which shews how puzzled they are to get on with their business; and all this goes on by establishing a Mail Coach [on] the Shrewsbury Road, which has completely knocked up their Coach."

I believe that at one point the Chester mailcoach was replaced by a mailcart but I cannot put my hands on the appropriate report.

Later, Mr Hasker was asked about the mails to and from Birmingham. The gist of his answers was that letters for Birmingham were carried from London by the Liverpool mailcoach to Coventry from where they were taken by a coach, "supplied by the gentlemen of Birmingham", arriving in Birmingham at about 11 a.m., an hour before the mailcoach to Shrewsbury and Holyhead. In the up direction, the Birmingham mail for London left at 4 p.m., one hour after the coach from Holyhead.

Further questioning elicited that the mailcoach from Holyhead arrived in Shrewsbury at 5 a.m. but did not leave there until 7 a.m. The reason for this was that the coach was "hastened" as far as Whitehurst from where the mail from Ireland for those parts of England north of Chester was carried in a mailcart to Chester where it arrived in time for the departure of the Liverpool and Manchester mailcoaches. He agreed that if the Chester mail were sent directly from Holyhead to Chester, the London mail could leave at a later hour, but he doubted if a Holyhead to Chester mailcoach would defray its expenses. He also stated that the mailcoach already running between Chester and Holyhead did not carry the Irish letters between those two towns; it only carried the London and bye-letters intermediate between London and Bangor. The reason for its continuing to Holyhead was for "the sake of passengers and parcels, to reimburse the contractors, not for the correspondence."

When the Committee reconvened eight days later the questioning of Mr Hasker continued. He said that if the mailcoach for Holyhead went through Coventry to Birmingham instead of through Oxford it would leave behind all the correspondence on both roads between London and Oxford, and "the collateral branches thereto"; all that from between Cirencester and Oxford; a great part of that from places between Cheltenham and Oxford; between Moreton in Marsh and Oxford; and all that between Oxford and Birmingham. A considerable part of this correspondence was brought into Oxford by the mailcoaches from Worcester and Gloucester which arrived in Oxford between 10 p.m. and 11 p.m. He agreed that there would be sufficient time for the mail brought by those two coaches as well as that carried by the mailcoach from Bath to be taken by a ride to the Coventry line of road at Towcester to catch the coach for Holyhead. Note that the mails from the Wycombe and Henley roads were not included; Freeling later pointed out that these contained all the correspondence from Eton and Harrow!

The next person to be examined by the Committee was Edward Lees, Secretary to the General Post Office, Dublin. In the course of his evidence he said if the mailcoach was to run through Coventry and Birmingham it could be made to arrive in Holyhead at 9.30 a.m. instead of about 2 p.m. Also, that within a year of the Irish mail being accelerated, the Revenue would be quadrupled. He did not appear to be closely questioned on these assertions.

When Freeling was recalled he agreed that a coach leaving London at the usual hour, and travelling at seven and a half miles per hour as far as Llangollen and from there at one miles per hour less, would reach Holyhead at 9 a.m. on the second morning, but he doubted if a speed greater than seven miles per hour could be maintained. He estimated the cost of a mailcoach to go through Coventry and Birmingham, transacting no other business but that of Wales and Ireland to be about £1600 p.a.

When Freeling was asked if he thought that expediting the correspondence between England and Ireland would considerably augment the public revenue, he replied:

"As a general principle certainly; but I cannot apply that answer to the particular measure in question, because I conceive that in accelerating the Mail to Dublin in the manner proposed, a considerable part of the correspondence of various parts of Great Britain with others, and also with Ireland, must be detained twenty-four hours. As a Post-Office measure, I conceive the Post-master General could not be justified in furthering it; if His Majesty's Government should think it necessary to take this out of the usual rules upon which the Post-Office has proceeded, that is another view of the case, and it would be the duty of the Post-Office, under these circumstances, to give every facility thereto."

The rest of Freeling's evidence added little to that of Mr Hasker, giving details of the mail that would be left behind, and agreeing that a ride from Oxford to Towcester would provide a suitable route for some of it, and that the bye letters for places as far down as Shrewsbury would not suffer delay if the coach through Oxford were continued as far as Shrewsbury.

The Committee recommended in its Report published in June 1815 that the Holyhead mailcoach should travel on the Coventry and Birmingham route in a time of thirty-seven hours, though every exertion should be made to reduce the time to thirty-three or thirty-one hours. The Post Office opposed the change until Vansittart, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, exerted some influence.

A transcript of a timebill of 1811 and a projected timebill for the new coach which are to be found in the appendices to the Report are reproduced on the next two pages. From the former it will be seen, as has been pointed out elsewhere, that a coach did not work the whole length of the journey. Five coaches were used to cover the distance between London and Holyhead. The latter gives the impression of having official sanction which was far from so. Later that year, Hasker complained to Freeling that a few days after his examination he had been asked to draw up a timebill for a coach travelling via Coventry and Birmingham, assuming that there were no impediments. On that basis, he had made out a supposed timebill which from the way it was presented in the Report "wears the face of reality" as though it had been proposed by the Post Office. What had annoyed him even more was the fact that Lees had drawn on this to produce another timebill with an even shorter time. Hasker commented that it was very easy to do this on paper but much more difficult in practice.

The aim of Lees was to bring the coach into Holyhead at 9 a.m. - a journey time of thirty-seven hours. The proposed and the then present times of arrival of the mail at towns in the Midlands are shown below.

	Proposed Time	Present Time	Proposed Time	Present Time
Coventry	7.45 a.m.	8.45 a.m.	7.30 p.m.	6.25 p.m.
Birmingham	10.00 a.m.	11.20 a.m.	5.05 p.m.	4.00 p.m.
Wolverhampton	12.05 p.m.	2.20 p.m.	2.50 p.m.	12.10 p.m.
Shrewsbury	4.00 p.m.	7.10 p.m.	10.50 a.m.	7.00 a.m.
Oswestry	6.20 p.m.	10.25 p.m.	8.15 a.m.	2.30 a.m.

Lees went on to outline the considerable advantages that the above towns would gain in terms of the time they had to reply by return of post. It can be seen that Wolverhampton, Shrewsbury and Oswestry stood to gain considerably. It appears that Lees had dropped the idea of the mailcoach only taking up mail for Wales and Ireland.

Eventually, the Post Office asked the mailcoach contractors to provide a quotation for a new mailcoach to Holyhead via Coventry. After some delay Messrs Willan and Waterhouse said in a joint proposal that to provide "a more expeditious conveyance of the Irish Mail" they were of the opinion that one shilling per mile each way daily on both lines of road might, "indemnify us, and in better times, leave us and those who will necessarily concerned with us, some compensation for our risque & labor." They pointed out that the trade which was already bad would be divided between two coaches at a time when oats had nearly doubled in price, and fewer people were travelling. They provided figures showing how the gross receipts of the Holyhead mailcoach had fallen in the first eleven months of 1816 compared with the same period in each of the previous seven years. Compared with 1813, the receipts were down by over £5,000. [I wonder what sum that represents in today's money.] They were so convinced that the new undertaking could not succeed they asked the Postmaster General to continue with the Oxford route, adding that the contractors would perform what was required in the time stipulated for ninepence per mile one way daily, saving the expense of an additional coach between London and Shrewsbury. Mr Waterhouse added a note stating that although he had no concern on the Oxford road, he agreed with Mr Willan's opinion that the coach through Oxford should have the remuneration. Exactly what these figures involved was detailed by Thomas Hasker in a report of November 1816.

London - Holyhead by Coventry	£10,072 p.a.
London - Shrewsbury by Oxford	£6,293
Total	£16,365
Present Expense	
London - Holyhead by Oxford	£1622
London - Birmingham by Coventry	£351

This gave an increase of expenditure of over £14,000, exclusive of the cost of the additional coach between Chester and Holyhead. Mr Hasker added that Mr Willan's offer to perform the journey on the Oxford road in thirty-eight hours at 9d per mile one way (4½d per mile each way) would cost only £2098 more than had been paid in the previous year.

Appendix, N° 2. *London to Holyhead.* HOLYHEAD AND [illegible] Mail Coach TIME-BILL; [illegible] for Post-Office Business;—

[illegible] Shewing, the Time [illegible] to perform each Stage, and also, the DISTANCE [illegible] each Stage.

GENERAL POST-OFFICE.

The Earl of SANDWICH and the Earl of CHICHESTER, His Majesty's Postmaster-General.

London (thro' Shrewsbury) to *Holyhead* TIME BILL.

CONTRACTORS Names.	MILES.	TIME Allowed. H.	M.	
				Dispatched from the General Post-Office, the 14th of Oct 1811, at 8 o'Clock [illegible] at 15 past 8 o'Clock / Coach N° [illegible] sent out / With a Time-Piece safe N° 25 to Graves
				Arrived at *Green Man and Still* at
Willan - -	18½	2	25	Arrived at *Uxbridge* at 10.40
Pratt - -	14	1	50	Arrived at *Wycomb* at 12.50
Allen - -	26	3	27	Arrived at *Oxford* at 4.40 by Time-Piece / at 4.25 by Clocks
			10	*Ten Minutes allowed for Office Duty.*
				Delivered the Time-Piece safe to Coach N° 210 gone forward Evans
Wentworth -	8	0	45	Arrived at *Woodstock* at 5.30
Milward - -	20½	2	50	Arrived at *Shipston* at 8.25
Wright - -	11	1	20	Arrived at *Stratford-on-Avon* at 9.40
			20	*Twenty Minutes are allowed for Breakfast.*
Barke & Vyse	12	1	30	Arrived at *Hockley Heath* at 11.40
Vyse - - -	11	1	25	Arrived at *Birmingham* at 12.10 by Time-Piece / at 11.50 by Clocks
				Delivered the Time-Piece safe to Coach N° 180 sent forward Yeomans
			30	*To be at* Birmingham *before* 12 *o'Clock, where Half an Hour is allowed for Dinner, Office Business, &c.*
				Dispatched from *Birmingham* at 12.30 by Time-Piece / at 12.15 by Clocks
Evans - -	14	1	50	Arrived at *Wolverhampton* at 2.25
Masefield -	12½	1	50	Arrived at *Shiffnal* at 4.15
			15	*Fifteen Minutes allowed for Office Business.*
Webb - - -	8	1	5	Arrived at *Wellington* at 5.35
Lawrence -	11	1	35	Arrived at the Post Office, *Shrewsbury*, the 15th of Oct 1811, at 7.10 by Time-Piece / at 6.50 by Clocks
	166½	23	7	
			45	*The Mail to be delivered at the Post Office,* Shrewsbury, *by Ten Minutes past Seven o'Clock in the Evening, where Forty-five Minutes are allowed for Office Duty.*
				Coach N° 190 arrived / Delivered the Time-Piece safe N° 25 to Yeomans

(continued)

(continued) *London* (thro' Shrewsbury) to *Holyhead* TIME BILL.

CONTRACTORS Names.	MILES.	TIME allowed. H.	M.	
				Dispatched from the Post-Office, *Shrewsbury*, the 15th of Oct 1811, at 7.55 by Time-Piece / at 7.30 by Clocks
				Coach N° 141 gone forward / Delivered the Time-Piece safe N° 25 to Yeomans
Lawrence -	8½	1	15	Arrived at *Nescliff* at 9.15
				Arrived at *Oswestry* at 10.10
			20	*Twenty Minutes allowed for Supper and Office Duty.*
				Arrived at *Whitehouse Gate* at
Leigh & Bolus	21½	3	15	Arrived at *Llangollen* at 2.15
Hunt & Clark	10	1	25	Arrived at *Corwen* at 3.40 by Time Piece / at [illegible] by Clocks
				Delivered the Time-Piece safe to
Dale & Weaver	13	1	45	Coach N° 93 gone forward Evans / Arrived at *Kennioge* at 5.25
Weaver - -	5	0	50	Arrived at *Rhydlanfair* at 6.15
Jones - -	10	1	30	Arrived at *Capel Carig* at 7.45
Griffiths - -	17	2	50	Arrived at *Bangor Ferry* at 10.35 / Coach N° 79 gone forward
			40	*Forty Minutes allowed for Crossing, &c.*
Mousedale -	12½	1	45	Arrived at *Gwyndie* at 1.5
Spencer - -	12½	1	45	
	110	18	5	Arrived at the Post Office, *Holyhead*, the 16th of Oct 1811, at 2.30 by Time-Piece / at [illegible] by Clocks
				Coach N° 79 arrived / Delivered the Time-Piece safe N° 25 to

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

By Command of the Postmaster-General.

T. HASKER,

Surveyor & Sup[t] of Mail Coaches.

100/22

Appendix, (N° 3.)—Proposed TIME-BILL between *Holyhead* (by *Birmingham* and *Coventry*) and *London*.

LONDON (through *Coventry* and *Birmingham*) To *HOLYHEAD*.

MILES.	Proposed TIME. H.	M.	
			Despatched from the GENERAL POST-OFFICE at Eight o'Clock P. M.
14 ½	2	0	Arrive at *Mims* at 10 o'Clock.
11 ½	1	30	Arrive at *Redburn* at 11. 30.
13	1	50	Arrive at *Hockliff* at 1. 20. A. M.
14	2	0	Arrive at *Stoney Stratford* at 3. 20.
8	1	10	Arrive at *Towcester* at 4. 30.
12	1	40	Arrive at *Daventry* at 6. 10.
8 ½	1	10	Arrive at *Dunchurch* at 7. 20.
11	1	25	Arrive at *Coventry* at 8. 45.
		20	Allow 20 minutes for Breakfast, &c.
18	2	25	Arrive at *Birmingham* at 11. 30.
	0	15	Allow 15 minutes for Coach business.
14	1	50	Arrive at *Wolverkampton* at 1. 20. P. M.
12 ½	1	50	Arrive at *Shiffnal* at 3. 10.
8	1	5	Arrive at *Wellington* at 4. 15.
11	1	30	Arrive at *Shrewsbury* at 6.
		30	Allow 30 Minutes for Dinner.
8 ½	1	15	Arrive at *Nescliff* at 7. 45.
9 ½	1	25	Arrive at *Oswestry* at 9. 10.
		20	Allow 20 minutes for Office Duty, Supper, &c.
12	1	45	Arrive at *Llangollen* at 11. 15.
10	1	25	Arrive at *Corwen* at 12. 40. A. M.
13	1	45	Arrive at *Kenniogie* at 2. 25.
5	0	50	Arrive at *Rhydlanfair* at 3. 15.
10	1	25	Arrive at *Capel Carig* at 4. 40.
17	2	15	Arrive at *Bangor Ferry* at 6. 55.
		40	Allow 40 minutes for Breakfast, Unloading, Crossing, and Reloading.
12 ½	1	45	Arrive at *Gwyndie* at 9. 20.
12 ½	1	40	Arrive at HOLYHEAD at 11 o'Clock.
265 ½	39	0	

HOLYHEAD (through *Birmingham* and *Coventry*) To *LONDON*.

MILES.	Proposed TIME. H.	M.	
			Despatched *from* HOLYHEAD at 3. 30. P.M.
12½	1	45	Arrive at *Gwyndie* at 5. 15.
12½	1	40	Arrive at *Bangor Ferry* at 6. 55.
		40	Allow 40 minutes for Unloading, Crossing, Reloading, &c.
17	2	50	Arrive at *Capel Carig* at 10. 25.
10	1	25	Arrive at *Rhydlanfair* at 11. 50.
5	0	50	Arrive at *Kenniogie* at 12. 40. A.M.
		20	Allow 20 minutes for Supper.
13	1	40	Arrive at *Corwen* at 2. 40.
10	1	20	Arrive at *Llangollen* at 4.
12	1	40	Arrive at *Oswestry* at 5. 40.
9½	1	20	Arrive at *Nescliff* at 7.
8½	1	15	Arrive at *Shrewsbury* at 8. 15.
		30	Allow 30 minutes for Breakfast and Coach business.
11	1	35	Arrive at *Wellington* at 10. 20.
8	1	5	Arrive at *Shiffnall* at 11. 25.
12½	1	55	Arrive at *Wolverhampton* at 1. 20. P.M.
14	1	55	Arrive at *Birmingham* at 3. 15.
		45	Allow 45 minutes for Dinner, Coach business, &c. &c.
18	2	25	Arrive at *Coventry* at 6. 25.
11	1	25	Arrive at *Dunchurch* at 7. 50.
8½	1	5	Arrive at *Daventry* at 8. 55.
12	1	40	Arrive at *Towcester* at 10. 35.
8	1	0	Arrive at *Stoney Stratford* at 11. 35.
14	2	5	Arrive at *Hockliff* at 1. 40. A.M.
13	1	45	Arrive at *Redburn* at 3. 25.
11½	1	30	Arrive at *Mims* at 4. 55.
14½	2	5	Arrive at The GENERAL POST-OFFICE at 7 o'Clock.
265½	39	30	

100/23

Hasker mentioned that Messrs Willan and Waterhouse had said to him that they would rather remain as they were than have their business disturbed. He felt that lower terms might be obtained by putting the matter out to open tender, but hesitated to recommend that as the business was so large there was much scope for things to go wrong. Yet, if the coach were established at an increased price, as it must be, it would soon be known by other contractors who would make extra demands or give notice to quit. The price for carrying the mails by coaches was very small considering the restrictions that were placed upon them. The reason that the contractors had been kept "quiet and regular" for so long was that they had all been regulated under one system. He went on: "and now on the interference of the Irish gentlemen proposing a line quite out of their way, they feel their power and request an enormous price which if agreed to will be followed by similar demands on other Roads. The Public too will assist them in their additional claim, for if this expedition is given to the Holyhead Road an increased pace will be required by many other Cities & Towns from one end of the Kingdom to the other."

Finally, Mr Hasker made the point that in many instances he had persuaded contractors to increase the speed of their coaches by carefully explaining to them the reasons. But when a new road was proposed through their line of road they increased their demands accordingly.

The response of Freeling to all of this was to send a very long report to the Postmaster General from which it is, I feel, worth quoting at some length. The parts in square brackets were marked "delete".

"The importance of the subject of the enclosed papers is such as to require your Lordships serious attention, and I am truly in want of all the assistance that can possibly be given to it.

The unexpected demand of a sum for this service which will entail an expence of £16,000 a year at least on the Post Office is indeed a forcible comment on the measure which the Irish Gentlemen have induced the Government to listen to, & however we may have failed in our endeavours to place the subject in its true light, we cannot conceal from ourselves, that if adopted, it must lead in its consequences to unnecessary expence, to arrangements confined to local benefits, & to a desertion of the principles which the general interests of correspondence require, [and to a supersession of the powers of the Postmaster General.]

If the Posts of this Kingdom and its dependencies are to be settled by public bodies - if the facts and reasonings of the Postmaster General arising from an intimate knowledge of an intricate and complex and extended system of business are to be entirely, as in this case, set aside [there can be little necessity for our Board, or at least it] (This Board) cannot be reponsible for the failure of its desire to keep down the public expenditure and to maintain an equal and indiscriminate regard to the public accommodation.

The apprehensions which your Lordships reluctantly expressed in all the stages of this business are now realizing, and to an extent of which even we ourselves had no idea.

These arguments attach to the possibility of the Irish Gentlemen having Interest enough to induce the Government to set up the coach through Coventry. Sir Henry Parnell will argue that if the people on the present line will do it in 38 hours, it can be accomplished in 37 on the proposed Road, being 9 miles nearer. Pledged as the Government seems to be, the only alternative is that of firmly resisting the greater and incurring the smaller expence of about £2098 per annum, but I am not sanguine enough to believe that this will satisfy that spirit with which the whole business has been taken up, and which has been influenced more by the possibility of accomplishing a certain number of miles within a given time, than by any knowledge of circumstances, any foresight of difficulties, or any calculation of natural and probable impediments, or of expence.

It is not irrelevant to call your Lordships recollection to the difficulties which we have had as to the correspondence of certain parts of Scotland etc. A due regard for the general interests of the correspondence has led you & your predecessors to resist to the utmost an acceleration of the Posts through Edinburgh in the way so tenaciously and perseveringly urged on this Department. In the present year one of the public bodies threatened to apply to Parliament.

The town of Newcastle has for years past pressed its claims to a Mail Coach to travel with all possible rapidity to and from London and that Town, regardless of all the interests of correspondence not connected with that place and its vicinity. As the Guardians of the Interests of Correspondence your Lordships have resisted all these attempts. The case is parallel with that before us, except that the letters to and from London, Newcastle, Sunderland and the two Shields amount to nearly one third more than that to be conveyed to and from Dublin.

The precedent once established, is it not natural to expect that Edinburgh and Glasgow will apply for Establishments distinct from those which now unite the correspondence of the line through which the Mail Coaches travel with all the important ramifications and connections therefrom, and if the amount of the Correspondence be the Criterion, that to be conveyed to Ireland cannot be compared with Edinburgh and little exceeds that to Glasgow. With respect to the former City, it cannot be denied that the Mail Coach could be made to arrive 4 hours earlier and to depart 4 hours later - it now travels through York a detour of 7 miles, on its return it waits there 2 hours & all this is done for the necessary advantages of the Coach System itself - for the convenience of everything connected with the interests of the Correspondence of a line of 400 miles in extent with the intersection of a District of Country stretching from the Humber to the Mersey..."

The Postmaster General or Freeling, or both, decided to ignore Mr Hasker's advice for within a month of Freeling's report the advertisement mentioned at the start of this article appeared. Yet, it was not until 12th June 1817 that Messrs Willan and Horne, the contractors for the mailcoaches to Holyhead via Shrewsbury and Chester, offered to carry the mail by their present routes in thirty-eight hours for fourpence a single mile. In an accompanying letter Mr Hasker said that this proposal would double the amount of £3370 p.a. then being paid. He mentioned that Mr Horne had said that if a coach was established through Coventry it would have such an harmful effect on the Chester he trusted the Postmaster General would release him from his contract.

However, Messrs Horne and Willan were not to know that on the 9th June, Mr Waterhouse, from the Swan with Two Necks in Lad Lane, had submitted a tender, on behalf of himself and his "connexions", to carry the mail to Holyhead for sixpence a mile each way (i.e. threepence a single mile). He offered to start on the 5th July.

Mr Hasker gave the following breakdown of the likely costs.

Mailcoach London to Holyhead via Coventry	£4836
Eleven Guards	£363
New Mailcoach Chester to Holyhead	£634
Express branch Oxford to Towcester	£400
Total	£6233

Set against this was a saving of £1282 made up of £448 from the withdrawal of the Birmingham and London coach, and £834 by discontinuing the present Holyhead mailcoach between Shrewsbury and Holyhead, giving a projected increase of about £4950 - more than three times Freeling's original estimate.

The new mailcoach did not start on 5th July for a letter sent by Mr Waterhouse to the other contractors on 14th July said that the Postmaster General and he had finally agreed it should start on, or about, 1st August. He asked his colleagues to meet himself and Mr Hasker at the Swan Inn, Birmingham on 21st inst. at 11 a.m.

In later years, Freeling was critised for being autocratic and resistant to change. Although he did seem reluctant to consider possible alternatives in this case, I do wonder if his objections to changing the route of the Holyhead mailcoach were not well founded. Was the revenue on mail sent to Ireland by that route sufficient to justify such a large increase in expenditure? Did the acceleration of the mailcoach increase the reliability of the mails between London and Dublin? I suspect that the effect was not as great as expected for one of the appendices to these Reports contains information on the delays to the packets. It would make a nice Statistics project to analyse that data and I would not be surprised if it showed that, in the winter months particularly, the time at which the mailcoach left Holyhead was immaterial. What was needed first, was a more reliable method of crossing the Irish Sea. But that is another story.

One final point, we shall see in a future edition of Midland Mail that five years later Freeling was blaming the alteration to the Holyhead mail for the high prices the Post Office was having to pay for some of the riding work.

References: First and Second Reports from Select Committee on Holyhead Roads etc., 1815. Post 71/2/7
Post 40/144/1815
Post 40/287/1816

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OXFORD-TOWCESTER-NORTHAMPTON

As has been seen in the previous article, the ride between Oxford and Towcester was introduced in 1817 so that mail for Ireland and places below Shrewsbury brought to Oxford by the mailcoaches from Gloucester and Worcester should not be delayed by twenty-four hours, but could be taken on from Towcester by the Holyhead mailcoach.

Mr Woodcock reported in July 1817 that he had received an offer to undertake the ride at £10 a mile, with the Post Office paying the riders of whom there had to be two working at any one time as a rider started from each end at about the same time and exchanged bags near to the mid-point of the ride, in this case at Ardley. In fact the riders, or guards as they were sometimes called were found by the Post Office. The ride was also said to require the provision of six horses if it was to be done well and Mr Woodcock agreed with this.

The ride was scheduled to leave Oxford at 11.15 p.m. but in a letter of 1821 the postmaster of Oxford said that the Gloucester and Worcester mailcoaches rarely arrived on time at 11 p.m. so after the thirty minutes taken up by the office duty it was often 11.40 or 11.45 p.m. before the Towcester ride was dispatched. There was little margin for delay and a late departure could result in the rider arriving in Towcester after the Holyhead mail had gone. In the opposite direction the rider was due to leave Towcester at 11 p.m., carrying letters brought by the Holyhead mail on its way to London and arrive in Towcester in time for letters to be sent forward on the mailcoaches to Gloucester and Worcester. The time allowed, four and a half hours, meant that the average speed was eight miles per hour - faster than some mailcoaches.

When he was setting up the ride, Mr Woodcock said that the whole length should be operated by one contractor. However, in March 1822, the part between Oxford and Ardley was undertaken by a Mr Pratt for £9 a mile.

The ride was withdrawn in November 1822 on the acceleration of the Gloucester and Worcester mailcoaches and the introduction of a new mailcoach between Birmingham and Oxford. But, in April 1823, Mr Churchill reported that as a consequence of the need to discontinue the mailcoach between Oxford and Birmingham, it would be necessary to reinstate the ride from Oxford to Towcester. Mr Churchill emphasised the importance of the correspondence between Oxford and Ireland as well as to Birmingham and places beyond, but added that the ride would not be as useful as before because the earlier arrival of the Holyhead mail meant that the ride could not leave Oxford later than 10.30 p.m. Consequently, any letters for Ireland brought by the Gloucester and Worcester mails at 11 p.m. had to be sent to Chipping Norton by the down Worcester mailcoach. He had found someone who was willing to perform the ride for £8 per mile - £256 p.a. - and 14/- a week for each of the two guards. Mr Churchill also mentioned that four horses were used each night. [I have come across a report of October 1821 concerning the withdrawal of an Oxford and Birmingham mailcoach. I hope to have sorted this out by the time the Surveyor's Journals reach the 1820s; in my defence I will say that the postal services in the South Midlands at that time appear to be of labyrinthine complexity.]

We have seen why the ride between Oxford and Towcester was so important - so important as to warrant being armed. Yet it is worthwhile describing that service for another reason - it must hold the record for the number of timebills still existing. From between 1817 and 1823, I have found about twenty, and I suspect that there may be more from later years. Every time there was a delay and the connection at either end was missed, the reason was recorded on the timebill by the appropriate postmaster. This was then included by Mr Woodcock in his monthly report on the riding work. The majority of the delays were caused by the one of the horses falling; this happened three times in December 1820. The following will give some idea of the general tone of the comments.

17/18 August 1817 - Arrived Towcester 4.20 a.m. The Oxford horse fell. The mailcoach detained ten minutes and the bags forwarded.
27/28 December 1817 - Arrived Towcester 4.40 a.m. The roads so very slippery in consequence of the frost after the rain and the horse not being rough shod, it was with difficulty the rider could proceed.
10/11 February 1818 - Arrived Towcester 7 a.m., Oxford 6.15 a.m. The horse on lower ground fell down & the Oxford rider got to Brackley before he met the lower one. My rider informs me the Middleton Horse could not stand on his legs, his shoes being so very smooth was down very often.
22/23 October 1818 - Arrived Towcester 5 a.m. The Towcester rider dropt the Oxford and Brackley bag from his pocket - hindered much time in looking for it but found it.
26/27 March 1819 - Arrived Oxford 4.45 a.m. Horse threw a shoe and broke a foot so the rider could not come up faster.
16/17 November 1821 - Arrived Oxford 8.55 a.m. The rider's horse from Towcester got from the man who was upwards of two hours before he could catch him. The Oxford rider finding he would be too late for the Mails did not hurry his horse.
3/4 December 1821 - [No time of arrival at Towcester given.] The Oxford rider did not arrive at Ardley until 30 m after 2 o'clock. The horse fell and ran into the flood at Gosford.

256

GENERAL POST-OFFICE.

Earl of CHICHESTER and Marquess of SALISBURY,
Postmaster-General.

Oxford and Towcester
TIME BILL.
DAILY.

Contractor.	Miles.	Time allowed H. M.		Hours.	Mins. after.
			Dispatched from the Post-Office, Oxford, the 17 of Nov 181 , at ..... P.M.	4	40
	32	4 30	Received at Towcester, the 18 of Nov 181 , A.M. at ..... In time for the Mail Coach.		
Mr. Roberts.			in consequence of the Horse taking fright and Stat[illegible] out of the Road - Broken his [illegible] Returned. and got [illegible] from [illegible]		
			Returned from Towcester, the 18 of Nov 182 , P.M. at.....	11	
	32	4 30	Received at the Post-Office, Oxford, the 19 of Nov 181 , A.M. at ..... In time for the Mails.	9	30

☞ *When any material Loss of Time occurs, the Deputy is to write the Cause of it upon the Time-Bill.*

The Time must be punctually observed, and the Bills correctly dated. On any particular irregularity happening, the Bill must be sent by the *first Post* to the Surveyor of the District, the others by *every Monday's Post*, and One Month before they are expended, notice to be given and one enclosed to him. If these Bills are misapplied, and it should be necessary to reprint them before Twelve Months, it will be done at the Postmaster's expence. August, 1819,——380.

S. WOODCOCK,
Surveyor of the General Post-Office.

254

GENERAL POST-OFFICE.

Earl of CHICHESTER and Marquess of SALISBURY,
Postmaster-General.

Oxford and Towcester
TIME BILL.
DAILY.

Contractor.	Miles.	Time allowed H. M.		Hours.	Mins. after.
			Dispatched from the Post-Office, Oxford, the 16 of Nov 182 , at ..... P.M.	4	45
	32	4 30	Received at Towcester, the 17 of Nov 182 , A.M. at ..... In Time for the Mail Coach.	3	50
Mr. Roberts,			Returned.		
The Rider's Horse from Towcester fell and got from the man who was upon it two hours before he could catch him The Post rider finding he could not catch him did not carry for the Mails			Returned from Towcester, the 17 of Nov 182 , P. M. at ...	11	
	32	4 30	Received at the Post-Office, Oxford, the 18 of Nov 182 , A. M. at ..... In time for the Mails.	8	55

☞ *When any material Loss of Time occurs, the Deputy is to write the Cause of it upon the Time-Bill.*

The Time must be punctually observed, and the Bills correctly dated. On any particular irregularity happening, the Bill to be sent by the *first Post* to the Surveyor of the District, the others by *every Monday's Post*, and One Month before they are expended notice to be given and one enclosed to him. If these Bills are misapplied, and it should be necessary to re-print them before Twelve Months, it will be done at the Postmaster's expence.—September, 1820.——380.

S. WOODCOCK,
Surveyor of the General Post-Office.

100/27

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I suspect that they may be other timebills to be found in reports up to 1825 for in December of that year the ride was taken out of the hands of the contractor on account of the repeated irregularities and "the unfitness of the Horses employed".

After the mailcoach from London to Manchester via Northampton and Leicester had been accelerated in 1819, it was suggested to Freeling that "it would afford considerable accommodation to that part of the country, if the ride between Daventry & Northampton were turned to Towcester." Freeling was in favour of the idea for it would provide the Duke of Grafton, among others, with a direct post to the county town. He assumed that no one would object to the increased rate from Daventry when a direct communication could be had with Towcester.

Since the distance from Northampton to Towcester of nine miles was three miles shorter than that to Daventry, Freeling said that it would not involve any increase in expenditure. However, Mr Hart found that the contractor for the Daventry ride, who was paid the low sum of £4.13.4 per mile per annum was glad to be quit of the contract on which he made a loss. The lowest offer that Mr Hart could obtain was £80 p.a. plus clothing for the guard, i.e. about £8 per mile per annum. The ride, which started in February 1820, left Northampton at about 11 p.m. and arrived back there at 3 a.m.

A rather strange series of incidents took place in November 1820. One of the riders, in a lengthy and detailed statement claimed that he had been accosted several times on his return journey by a man on horseback. This had culminated in an incident in which a shot had been fired at him, the bullet lodging in the case that carried the bags. Freeling did not believe any of the long, involved tale and said that the man should be dismissed as he was unfit to be trusted with the mails.

The year 1827 saw the amalgamation of the two rides from Towcester. Although I cannot find any report that states categorically it was intended to set up a post from Northampton through Towcester to Oxford, it is implied in at least two reports. In January 1827, the contractor for the Oxford and Towcester ride gave notice of his intention to quit. He gave as his reasons the facts that the weight of the bags made it impossible for him to perform on horseback and the guards found by the Post Office did not take proper care of his horses. The service had been performed at an annual cost of about £360 (£288 for the ride plus 16/- a week for each of two guards). Mr Rideout found that he could not obtain an offer for the ride unless the guards were dispensed with. He did find that a contractor at Oxford was willing to perform the ride with carts, of which two were needed, and find his own men for £424 p.a. Mr Rideout added that, for some time past, on the days the Oxford papers were published the weight of the bags made it impossible to carry them on horseback, and that the Northampton bag would add to the bulk and make a cart indispensable. In another report written ten days later, Mr Rideout stated that the contractor for the Northampton to Towcester ride could not make an offer for the alterations which had already been sanctioned and the postmasters at Northampton, Towcester and Oxford had been told to start on the following Monday, so he would be required to quit without notice, though he was to be paid compensation. Mr Rideout reported that the Oxford to Towcester contractor was willing to undertake the section to Northampton for £99 p.a.

The mailcart left Northampton as soon as the letters from the up Manchester mailcoach had been sorted - between 12 and 12.30 a.m., called at Towcester to take up letters brought by the up Liverpool and Holyhead mailcoaches, and arrived in Oxford at about 6 a.m. The times in 1827 in the reverse direction were not given but in 1834 the cart left Oxford at 6 a.m.

On the night of 15th October 1827, the bags were stolen from the mailcart while it was at Brackley. The robbery is described in a report made at Brackley:

"The mail cart arrived from Oxford at this Post Office at eleven o'clock last night and the Boy having given Mrs Lathbury the Oxford bag & taken the Towcester and Northampton in exchange out of her chamber window took his horse from the shafts & went into the stable for the fresh horse. Whilst he was in the stableyard Mrs L heard the lid of the Box containing the Bags shut and her attention being drawn to this circumstance by hearing the Boy afterwards return from the yard, mentioned it to him, but it appearsthat he did not examine the Box. The Boy states that he first discovered that the Bags were missing on calling at a house in Pack Lane Towcester ..."

The bags were found in the water under a bridge about a mile from Brackley on the Banbury road. The seals on the bags had been broken and some of the letters opened. A warrant was issued for the arrest of two local men whom the driver had recognised standing not far from the cart and who at 10 p.m. had been drinking in a public house opposite the post office.

Although this crosspost in the South Midlands seems to have been more incident prone than most, the reports described already may not seem particularly unusual, but there is surely a bizarre aspect to that written by Freeling in June 1828:

"... on the 5th May the Driver of the Mail Cart between Northampton and Oxford was in such a state of intoxication, that the Postmr of the former Town refused to entrust him with the Letter Bags, and that the man was in the habit of carrying Foxes and actually had one in his possession at that time ... it appears also that the 5th May was a Fair day at Northampton & that the driver had certainly taken more Liquor than he ought. The Contractor is unwilling to discharge the young man from his Service without a character which would be injurious to him thro' life and it rests with your Grace to decide whether he shall again be employed in the Service. Perhaps under all the circumstances of the Case, the fact of its being Fair day, his general good character for sobriety etc., the suspension he has undergone may be sufficient ..., and may operate as a salutary warning to him as to his future conduct with a general prohibition against conveying Foxes in the Mail Cart ..."

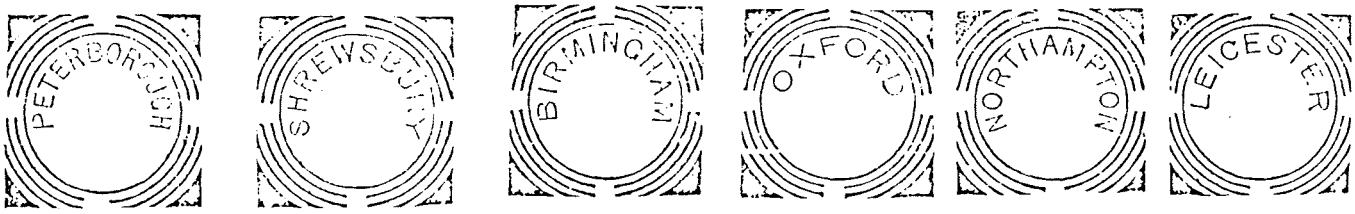
Freeling was in a benevolent mood, as was the Duke of Manchester who wrote: "Approved - Tho' from the carrying of Foxes I should much doubt his connexions."

References: Post 40/168/1817, 40/285/1819, 40/19/1820, 40/336/1820, 40/347/1820, 40/29/1821, 40/374/1821, 40/86/1822, 40/112/1822, 40/53/1827, 40/414/1827, 40/414/1827, 40/592/1827, 42/495/1828, 40/625/1832.
Timebills: 40/239/1817, 40/62/1818, 40/429/1818, 40/378/1820, 40/392/1821, 40/415/1821, 40/40/1822, 40/103/182, 40/352/1822

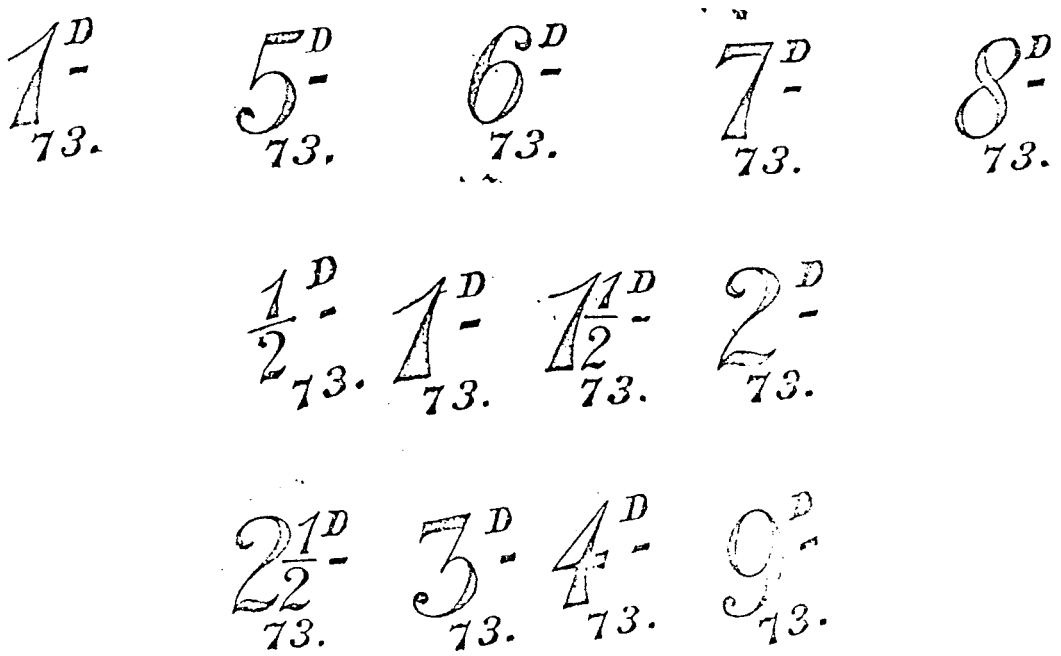
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"LONDON" POSTMARKS

Volume 48 of the Steel Impression Books in Post Office Archives is devoted largely to postmarks of the London area. However, it does contain some provincial marks as well as those used in the T.P.Os. I am rather intrigued as to why the squared circle marks shown below were sent to The Director, Confidential Enquiry Branch of the G.P.O. on 16th February 1894. Does any member know the reason?



Also to be found in the same volume are a number of surcharge marks issued to Bilston. Those in the first row were issued on 29 December 1904; the remainder were issued on 7th January 1905.



FROM HOTEL TO POST OFFICE

by Derek Woodhall

Some years ago, when my son had a small collection of paper ephemera, he was given several old newspapers. Imagine my surprise when I was invited to look through them, to find tucked in among the New Zealand papers a rather dilapidated copy of the Birmingham Weekly Post dated Friday, December 9, 1938. How that had come to New Zealand and survived the passage ofyears we shall never know, but to me it was like meeting an old and well-loved friend. During my early years in New Zealand (1950s) my mother used to send me the current edition, but when its publication ceased a few years later, that was that.

In the section headed "One Hundred Years Ago" was a report taken from The Birmingham Journal of 8th December 1838 about the opening of the New Royal Hotel, New Street which is shown in the engraving reproduced below.



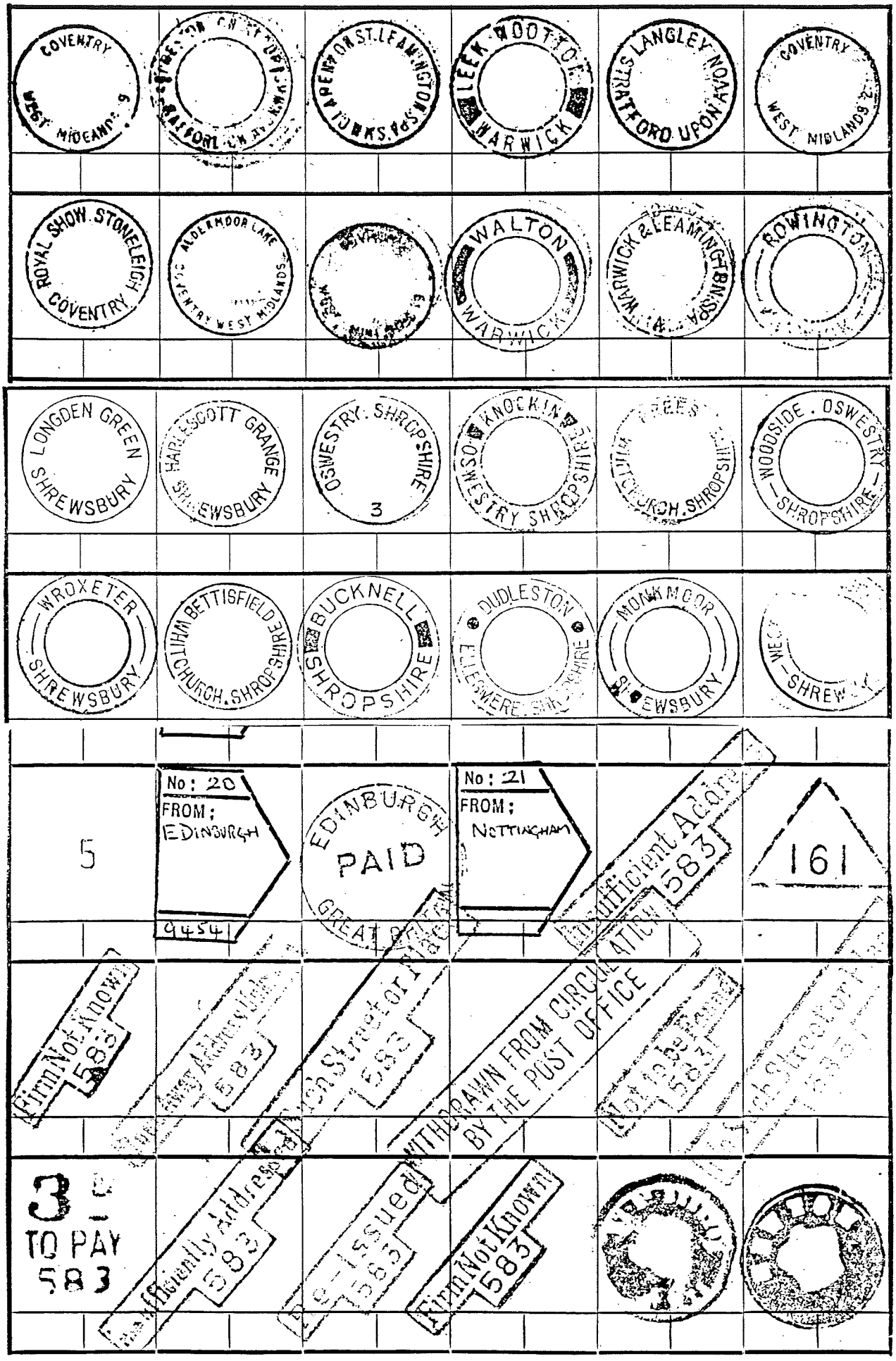
As I live so far from source material for my various researches, I was very pleased to receive additional information from Eric and Elizabeth Lewis who continued the story:

"In 1842, the hotel building became the post office who shared it with the Inland Revenue. The post office was located in the right-hand wing, and the letter carriers' office and the Inland Revenue office were in the centre portion. The building was situated at the corner of Bennett's Hill and New Street, and the canopy was removed. The post office moved out of this building in 1874."

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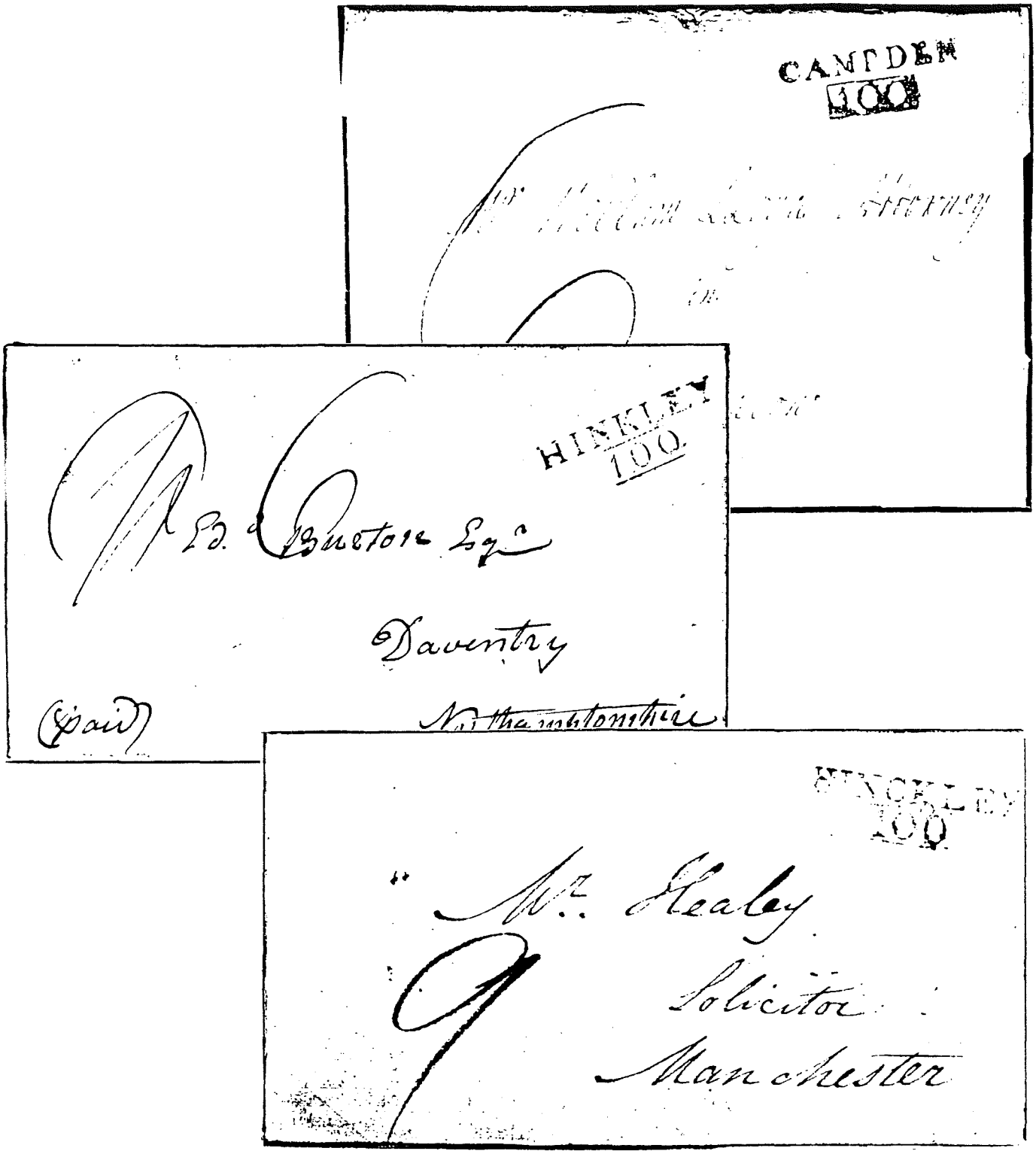
A LOAD OF SCRAP

On the opposite page are copies of part of pages from those volumes of Post 55 which contain impressions of hand-stamps made before scrapping. The first two rows are from 11th November 1980; the next two are from one of nine pages of Shrewsbury marks scrapped on 14th January 1980 (Post 55/248), and there are lots more in 55/244; and finally some explanatory marks from Nottingham which were scrapped in November 1968. My thanks to Post Office Archives for permission to reproduce these postmarks.


COVENTRY
WEST MIDLANDS
LEEK WOOTTON WARWICK
HATTON STRATFORD UPON AVON
COVENTRY
WEST MIDLANDS
ROYAL SHOW STONELEIGH COVENTRY
WALTON WARWICK
WARWICK & LEAMINGTON SPA
ROWINGTON
LONGDEN GREEN SHREWSBURY
HARLESCOTT GRANGE SHREWSBURY
OSWESTRY SHROPSHIRE 3
KNOCKIN OSWESTRY SHROPSHIRE
WOODSIDE OSWESTRY SHROPSHIRE
WROXETER SHREWSBURY
WHITCHURCH SHROPSHIRE
BUCKNELL SHROPSHIRE
DUDLESTON ELLESMERE SHROPSHIRE
MONKMOOR SHREWSBURY
5
No: 20
FROM:
EDINBURGH
9454
EDINBURGH
PAID
No: 21
FROM:
NOTTINGHAM
Insufficient Addr
583
161
Firm Not Known
583
Friendly address
583
Not Known
583
WITHDRAWN FROM CIRCULATION
BY THE POST OFFICE
3
TO PAY
583
Friendly address
583
Not Known
583

ONE HUNDRED MILES FROM LONDON

To round off this one hundredth issue, I thought it would be appropriate to show mileage marks from those post-towns which were one hundred miles from London. To my knowledge there were only two in the Midlands - Hinckley and Chipping Campden. I am indebted to John Calladine for providing the copy of the Campden mark.



THE NEXT MIDLAND MAIL

It is possible that it will be early September before this is issued, so please note the date of the September meeting. The next issue will contain a further instalment from the Surveyors' Journals and something on six-day posts. It will be accompanied by an index to the first hundred issues. There is plenty of room for other articles which should be sent to:

John Soer, 51d Barkham Road, Wokingham RG41 2RG