

Two Mile Ash Site.

Mail/ Stage Coaches through Stoke Goldington

NB Turnpike Trusts were set up in the early 18th century to improve major highways; tolls were imposed on users of roads, the income being used to pay for maintenance.

The Royal was carried on these major roads in specially designed and constructed vehicles " Mail coaches" and they maintained an average speed of 10 MPH.

The vehicles and guards were supplied by the Post Office with the horses supplied by Contactors, Maintenance of time was important, the guards were provided with chronometers that were sealed before departshire at 8pm (half an hour earlier on Sundays) from the post office in the Strand in London, Blunderbuss weapons were also provided for protection.

During bad weather (e.g. the vehicles being stuck in snow drifts or flooded river fords) the guard was expected to take the postbags forward riding one of the horses from the coach team.

In the 1830s the following coaches passed through the village.

a) London and Manchester.

Horse contractor W Chaplin & Co,

North bound departed from The Swan with Two Necks Lad Lane at 7.30 pm and called at the General Post Office at 8.0pm then onward through St Albans, Dunstable, Hockcliffe, Woburn, (12.27am) Stoke Goldington, 1.45am (approx) Northampton, 2.45am then Market Harborough, Leister, Loughborough, Derby, Ashbourne, Macclsfield, aiming at Manchester 3.00pm; a journey time of 19 hours for 191 miles. (The stagecoaches could take up to 24 hours).

The southbound Vehicle left Manchester 10.00am passed Stoke Goldington about 12.15 am and arrived at General Post Office at 6.26pm.

b) London To Liverpool (Woodside)

Horse Contractor BW Horne & Co.

North bound departed from Golden Cross Inn, Charring Cross at 7.30 pm and called at the General Post Office at 8.0pm. Northward thro" Woburn 12.31am (4 minuets later than the Manchester! Stoke Goldington 2.0am and Northampton 3.37am – much later than the Manchester, Was Northampton an "early breakfast stop"?

Then on to Lutterworth, Hinckley, Atherton, Tamworth, Litchfield, Stafford, Nantwich, Chester arriving at Birkenhead Woodside for Liverpool 5.54pm.

The Mail was then ferried across the River Mersey to Liverpool

The southbound journey left Woodside 8.40am passing through Stoke Goldington about 30 minuets after midnight.

c) London to Halifax.

Horse contractor W Chaplin & Co,

Also left Golden Cross Inn, Charring Cross at 7.30 pm and General Post Office at 8.0pm and passed through Newport Pagnal 1.11am and Stoke about 30 minuets later. Then through Northampton, Market Harborough, Leicester. Loughborough, Nottingham, Chesterfield, Sheffield, Huddersfield arriving at Halifax 4.05pm.

The southward journey left Halifax 10.45am passed through Stoke about 1015am and arrived in London 6.45am

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Stage Coaches.

All items provided by operating company licensed to carry 4 passengers “inside” and 11 “outside”

i. “The Courier” To Leeds.

Operator: J. Francis & Co.

Departed Belle Sauvage Inn Ludgate Hill 5pm.

Northward Through Stoke Then Northampton, Market Harborough, Leicester, Loughborough, Nottingham, Mansfield, Chesterfield, Sheffield, Barnsley, Wakefield & Leeds, 177 miles, journey time 24 hours.

The southbound left Leeds 6pm.

ii. “The Union” to Leicester.

Operator: E. Sherman.

Departed ‘Bull & Mouth’ Inn St Martins-le Grand 6.30am northwards through Stoke Goldington, Northampton, Market Harborough to Leicester. 98 miles, 12 hours journey time.

iii. “Umpire” To Liverpool

Operator BW. Home.

Departed “Golden Cross” Inn Charring Cross at 2pm, Through Stoke at about 8pm & continuing through Northampton, Welford, Lutterworth, Hinkley Tamworth, Lichfield, Newcastle-under-lyne. Warrington and Liverpool, 211 miles with a journey time of 24 hours.

The southward journey left Liverpool 12 noon.

Interestingly whilst the Mail coach took the more unusual route through Chester and the Wirral, this stagecoach followed the more traditional route, crossing the Mersey at Runcorn then heading northward to Warrington before turning west to Liverpool.

iv. “The Telegraph” To Manchester.

Operator E. Sherman & Co.

Departed ‘Bull & Mouth’ Inn St Martins-le Grand 5.30am northwards through Stoke Goldington at about 11.30am then Northampton, Market Harborough to Leicester. Loughborough, Derby, Ashbourne, Leek, Macclesfield, Stockport and Manchester, 191 miles with a Journey time of 18.5 hours, an average speed of nearly 10.5mph & somewhat faster than the Liverpool 9mph

The southward journey departed Manchester 5am.

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i. “The Northampton”

Operator E. Sherman & Co.

Departed “Angel” Bridge Street, Northampton 9.30am passing through Stoke about 11am arriving at “The Bull and Mouth” St Mary-le Grand 4.30pm a journey time of 7 hours for 66 miles.

The northward journey left “The Bull and Mouth” at 12 noon, passing through Stoke about 5.30pm and arrived at the “Angel” at 7pm.

ii. “The Times” To Nottingham.

Operator W.Chaplin & Co.

Departed from The Swan with Two Necks Lad Lane at 6.45am, passing through Stoke about 12.45pm & onward through Northampton, Market Harborough, Leicester, Loughborough and Nottingham. 124 miles with a journey time of 14.3/4 hours.

iii. “The Commercial” To Nottingham.

Operator W.Chaplin & Co.

Departed from The Swan with Two Necks Lad Lane at 12.45pm, Known as the “night coach” Passing through Stoke about 6.45am & onward through Northampton, Market Harborough, Leicester, Loughborough and Nottingham. 124 miles with a journey time of 14.3/4 hours.

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The inhabitants of Stoke obtained gainful employment from the infrastructure needed to support the coach services ostlers, Inn staff, road maintenance, forage supplies etc. Incidentally the fares charged were 2 1/2d (1p) per mile outside the coach and 4 1/2d inside, but with weekly earnings of some 12 shillings (60p) the good folk of Stoke could not afford to travel far in spite of the numerous destinations on offer.

But this was all to change for a competitor no horse drawn road transport could resist, the steam railway!

The London to Birmingham railway was operating complete by 1830's although for a time in 1838, because of work at Kilsley Tunnel and Roade cutting, services terminated at Denbigh Hall on Watling Street just north of Bletchley. A connecting coach shuttle service operated to rugby where passengers re-boarded the train to Birmingham.

For a time local coaches acted as feeders to the but with the Victorian boom most towns had railway connections.

The authors great grandmother recalled grass and weeds growing in the highway in the 1890's. However history repeated itself with the road transport renaissance of the 20th century by the 1920's long distance motor coaches served the village with destinations almost identical with those of the horse drawn age.

The village became the base for a well known coach operator, Wesley's, who's apt slogan "Travel the Wesley Way" was seen far and wide both in the UK and on the Continent up until the 1980's. Now in the 21st century the village has but two or three services a day to Milton Keynes and Northampton, a victim, like others, to the motor car but fortunate still to have public transport.

Sources.

Copied from hand written pages by Andrew Shouler

- a Pigot & Co's "National Commercial Directory 1830" reprinted by Northamptonshire Libraries in 1975.
- b Directory of Stagecoach Services 1836; Alan Bates. Published by David & Charles in 1969.
- c The Geography of Coaching in Early 19th Century Northamptonshire by D H Kennett Journal of the Northamptonshire Record Society 1974,
- d London & Birmingham a Railway of Consequence, by David Jenkinson, Capitol Transport 1988.

