

The • Last
of the
Mail • Coach • Guards.



MR. M. J. NOBBS

OLD COACHING DAYS

SOME INCIDENTS

IN THE LIFE OF

MOSES JAMES NOBBS,

THE LAST OF THE MAIL COACH GUARDS.

Told by Himself

With a Preface by the Controller of the London
Postal Service.

Price Sixpence.

PREFACE.

BY the operation of the new Order in Council regulating Civil Service superannuations, under which officers who have attained the age of sixty-five have—*nolens volens*—to take their pensions, there will be, at the end of this year 1891, quite an exodus of many who through the survival of the strongest and fittest are still serving Her Majesty, although they have reached the Psalmist's allotted span of three score years and ten.

The loss of our veterans in this manner will be accompanied by many a pang of regret, but in the case of Mr. Moses James Nobbs, the last of the Mail Coach Guards, who is now about to be pensioned, the regret is softened by the circumstance that he recognises his inability to work any longer, and finds the quiet and comfort of country life at Uxbridge, to which place he is retiring, more suitable than Post Office occupation at a busy London Railway Station.

Mr. Nobbs has been in the service of the Post Office fifty-five years. He commenced life as a Mail Guard, and for years worked on Mail coaches. When the old coach system was superseded by railway service Mr. Nobbs did postal duty for some years as Mail Guard on the London and Exeter Railway, and was afterwards appointed to superintend the receipt and despatch of Mail bags at Paddington Station. Thus he was better known to travellers of all degrees on the Great Western line of Railway than to his fellow-servants, with whom he was not brought much into contact, owing to the fact that his duties confined him to the Paddington Terminus. In order, therefore, that this Post Office *rara avis* might be brought into prominence—as his early retirement was then foreseen—I wrote of him as follows in a published report on the Post Office work in the Christmas Season of 1889:—

“The Christmas postal traffic on the Great Western Railway necessitated the running of the Night Mail train in two portions between

London and Penzance, the first part taking the passengers, and the second being reserved exclusively for the Mails. Strangely enough, the despatch of the Mails from Paddington Station was superintended by the only Mail Coach Guard now in the service, Mr. James Nobbs, who for over fifty years has most faithfully looked after Her Majesty's Mails. He well recollects that on Christmas Eve, 1839, just prior to the introduction of the Penny Post, he was the Guard to the Mail Coach running between Cheltenham and Aberystwith. What a contrast! His Christmas night's load of Mails in 1839 did not exceed a hundredweight. In 1889 he saw off from Paddington twenty tons of Mail matter in the day, in the most prosaic manner, with no blowing of musical horn, and no carrying of deadly blunderbuss, as of yore. The still hale and hearty old gentleman, in the picturesque costume of the Mail Guard of the past, is a prominent figure at Paddington Station, and long may he so remain."

Mr. F. E. Baines, C.B., Inspector-General of Mails, in his well-known humorous style, gave

in "*Blackfriars*" the following account of a coach trip taken to Brighton by the chiefs of the Post Office Department, to inaugurate a Parcel Post Service by road with "London-super-Mare":—

"Mr. Moses James Nobbs, the last (I think) surviving Mail Guard, began work June 27th, 1836, and still does duty as Mail Officer at Paddington. He could remember a good deal in his fifty-three years of service. Old memories must have revived as he went down from London to Brighton, two or three years ago, as Guard in charge of the special trip of the new Brighton Parcel Coach. He was fully equipped, as of yore, for that perilous journey, a timepiece from Jamaica serving to complete the outfit. We maintained (within an hour or two) a moderate punctuality, but the tropic sun, or a luncheon at Red Hill, I know not which—perhaps both—disturbed the due action of the watch. 'Thrice armed the Guard who hath his timepiece just.' All the same, a blunderbuss from Exeter was handed in at the last moment to make our armament fourfold;

and, I grieve to state, had, amidst the delighted and (I fear) ironical cheers of a crowded courtyard, to be tied on to the hind seat with official string."

Mr. Baines considerably omitted to say that Mr. Nobbs' attempts to blow the horn were somewhat of a failure. When, for the sake of Auld Lang Syne, he was asked to act as guard to the coach, he represented that he could not blow a horn owing to having lost several teeth. He was, however, persuaded to attempt it, and to practise beforehand. Unfortunately his efforts in going down that busy London artery – Cheapside – were futile, and the feeble sounds he managed to extract from the horn excited the derision of all the street urchins *en route*. Mr. Nobbs took his discomfiture in perfect good humour, and I feel sure will not be offended at this public allusion to the amusing incident.

Another *contretemps* on the same journey was the stoppage of the coach at the bottom of Cheapside by the police on account of the

coachman—that well known jehu, Mr. John Manley Birch—trying to take the coach on the wrong side of a particular post. Sir Arthur Blackwood tried his persuasive powers, Mr. Algernon Turnor threatened pains and penalties for the interference with Her Majesty's Royal Mail, but the policemen were inexorable. The position was getting rather ludicrous, and the immense traffic was being considerably impeded, when, in a twinkling, our resolute coachman saw his opportunity, and having for leaders two horses accustomed to run in a fire-engine and quick to get a start, drove past the astonished policemen—who were not prepared for such a dash—and away we sped amid the plaudits of the assembled crowd.

At the *Conversazione* at the South Kensington Museum in 1890, in celebration of the Jubilee of Penny Postage, Mr. Nobbs, as one of the oldest officers in the Postal Service, had the honour of presenting to Her Royal Highness the Duchess of Edinburgh a letter signed by old officers of the Post Office, who entered the

service more than fifty years previously. Again, at a meeting which was held at the General Post Office to inaugurate the City Telegraph Messengers' Institute, Mr. Nobbs in his brilliant scarlet coat put Postmen and Telegraph Messengers quite into the shade. He said at this meeting what a boon it would have been to him if Institutes, with night classes, had been formed in the days when he first donned Her Majesty's uniform. If he could then have obtained the educational advantages now enjoyed by every Telegraph Boy employed in the City, he would not, after a period of fifty-five years of most faithful and zealous service have occupied at the last the comparatively subordinate position of a Mail Guard.

In order that this good old man may not depart without some testimony that his sterling qualities have been recognised and respected, it has occurred to me that the publication of some incidents of his life, told by himself, may be of interest, as the words of a man who has seen the old order of things

entirely displaced by the new, and who, by his integrity and unflagging zeal in a long life of faithful devotion to duty, has well exhibited —

“The constant service of the antique world,
When service sweat for duty, not for meed.”

In introducing his interesting narrative, I would remark that the self-sacrificing spirit which Mr. Nobbs displayed on the trying occasions recalled in these reminiscences has characterised the whole of his official career. He would have deserved well of his country if he had done nothing more than show by his example, as he certainly has done, that he acted up to the *bon mot*, given in his narrative, that he would never “damage his own health by drinking other people’s.” Certainly no one should know so well as an old Mail Guard how many people put an enemy in their mouths to steal away their brains; and no doubt Mr. Nobbs has carried many a Squeers who found it necessary to alight at every stage “to stretch his legs,” but whose breath on getting up again was redolent of gin. Mr.

Nobbs has, however, done more than present an example of self-control and temperance. To use his own unaffected words, it has always been his "greatest ambition" to do his duty faithfully, and thus earn the confidence of his superior officers. To this ambition he has been consistent throughout. He has succeeded in winning the confidence and esteem of his official superiors, and he retires from the Service with their heartiest good wishes.

R. C. TOMBS.
December, 1891.



SOME INCIDENTS

IN THE LIFE OF

MOSES JAMES NOBBS.

ON retiring from the Service of the Post Office after fifty-five years spent in harness, it has been suggested to me that some account of my experience of Post Office work in the days before the railways were established might be of interest to many who have no knowledge of "the good old coaching days," except what they have acquired by hearsay or from books. I

will, therefore, set down a few of the incidents that stand out most clearly in my memory. They will show, at any rate, that life on a Mail Coach fifty years ago was not all “beer and skittles,” though enjoyable enough at times.

I was born in Angel Street, Norwich, on the 12th May, 1817. My father was a coach-builder, and had at that time a contract for the construction and repair of the Mail and other coaches running in and out of Norwich. I was brought up to the same business until I was about nineteen, when my entry into the Mail Service was brought about in this way. My father was a staunch Whig, and about the year 1835 there happened to be a General Election. In those times the polling at an election lasted for fourteen days, and I can remember that I took a very keen interest in the proceedings. My father had seven tenants, and these were kept in reserve until the final day of the polling, when they were the last men to vote. Their votes carried the election. Some little time afterwards, the member who was elected showed his gratitude to my father by getting

me an appointment in the Post Office Service. When I was leaving home to take up my new duties, my father—who, no doubt, knew the temptations of the life I was about to enter upon—gave me an excellent piece of advice, which I never forgot, and which was of great benefit to me in after years. He told me “Never to injure my own health by drinking other people’s.”

About Midsummer in 1836, then, I was sent down to act as guard to the Mail from London to Stroud, and shortly afterwards was transferred to the Mail running from Peterborough to Hull. It was not very long before I had another change, and this time I was appointed to the Portsmouth and Bristol Mail as a regular duty. This was a night journey, and occupied about 12 hours—from 7.0 p.m. to 7.0 a.m. My duty as Mail Guard was to take charge of the Mail bags and protect them.

This winter of 1836 was the first I passed on the road, and a severe one it was too. There were terrible snow-storms towards Christmas

time, and many parts of the country were completely blocked. I had one very rough experience of what my new duties were to be like. After leaving Bristol one night at 7.0 p.m. all went well until we were nearing Salisbury, that is to say, about midnight. Snow had been falling gently for some time before, but after leaving Salisbury it came down so thick and lay so deep that we were brought to a standstill, and found it impossible to proceed any further. Consequently we had to leave the coach and go on horseback to the next changing place, where I took a fresh horse and started for Southampton. There I procured a chaise and pair and continued my journey to Portsmouth, arriving there about 6.0 p.m. the next day. I was then ordered to go back to Bristol. On reaching Southampton on my return journey I found the snow had got much deeper, and at Salisbury I found that the London Mails had arrived, but could not proceed any further, the snow being so very deep. Not to be done, I took a horse out of the stable, slung the Mail bags over his back, and pushed on for Bristol, where I arrived next

day, after much wandering through fields, up and down lanes, and across country — all one dreary expanse of snow. By this time I was about ready for a rest, but there was no rest for me in Bristol, for I was ordered by the Mail Inspector to take the Mails on to Birmingham, as there was no other Mail Guard available. At last I arrived at Birmingham, having been on duty for two nights and days continuously without taking my clothes off. I may add that for my exertions and perseverance in getting the Mails through I received a letter of thanks from the Postmaster-General.

I remained on the Bristol and Portsmouth Mail for ten months, when I was transferred to the London, Yeovil and Exeter Mail. We had a very sad accident with that Mail once between Whitchurch and Andover. The coach used to start from Piccadilly, where all the passengers and baggage were taken up. On this occasion the Mail was brought up to Piccadilly by me in a cart as usual, and we were off in a few seconds. My coachman had been having a drinking bout with a friend that day, and

when we had got a few miles on the road I discovered that coachee was the worse for drink, and that it was not safe for him to drive; so when we reached Hounslow I made him get off the box seat. After securing the Mail bags, and putting the coachman in my seat and strapping him in, I took the ribbons. At Whitchurch the coachman unstrapped himself and exchanged places with me, but we had not proceeded more than three miles when, the coach giving a jolt over a heap of stones, he fell between the horses, and the wheels of the coach ran over him, killing him on the spot. The horses, having no driver, broke into full gallop, so, as there was no front passenger, I climbed over the roof to gather up the reins, when I found that they had fallen among the horses' feet and were trodden to bits. Returning over the roof I missed my hold and fell into the road, but fortunately with no worse result than some bruises and a sprained ankle. The horses kept on until they reached Andover, where they pulled up at the usual spot. Strange to say, no damage was done to the coach, though there was a very steep hill to

go down. The old Exeter Mail, running from London to Exeter, which came behind our coach, found the body of my coachman on the road, and, a mile further on, picked me up. Notwithstanding the excitement I had undergone, and the bruising I had sustained, I took my Mails on to Exeter and returned the next day for the inquest.

Accidents of one kind and another were not uncommon on the road, though some, of course, made more impression on me than others. I remember that when bowling along towards Andover one very dark night I noticed something lying at the side of the road. The coachman pulled up, and I found that it was a man with his head smashed to pieces. I wrapped the poor fellow's remains in my shawl, and took them on to Andover, returning from Exeter on the following day to be on the inquest. It turned out that the man had been riding on the shaft of a lime waggon, and falling off—probably while asleep—the wheels had gone over his head. On another occasion, in a different part of the country,

when my coach was nearing Cheltenham, our leaders knocked down a man who was walking along the road from Cheltenham Fair. The front part of his head was crushed by the horse's hoofs, and the wheels of the coach went over him.

In 1838 I was transferred to the Cheltenham and Aberystwith Mail, leaving Cheltenham at 7.0 a.m. and arriving at Aberystwith at 9.0 p.m. I worked this Mail for 16 years – from 1838 to 1854 – and this was the most eventful period of my career. The road ran through a fearful country, and we had to go over Plinlimmon Mountain, the top of which is about 2,000 feet above the sea level. We had many accidents and adventures with this coach. For example, we left Hereford one market day, the wind blowing a hurricane. When we reached St. Owen's turnpike gate I saw that the gate was closed, and blew the horn for the gatekeeper to open it. He threw the gate wide open, when it rebounded and struck one of the leaders, which so frightened the team that they got completely out of hand, and galloped down

the road as fast as they could lay feet to the ground. The coachman was a very nervous man, and, finding he could not control the horses or pull them up, he threw himself off the box into the road, with the result that the back part of his head was dashed in. The horses, now at full gallop, ran into a donkey cart in which an old woman and her daughter were going home from market, and doubled it up completely. The daughter heard the noise of the approaching coach and jumped out in time to save herself, but the poor old woman was kicked to death before I could cut the harness to release the leaders, which had fallen and got mixed up with the remains of the cart. I had the bodies of the old woman and the coachman placed on hurdles and carried to the Infirmary. Meanwhile the leaders had broken loose from the coach and galloped on for about two miles. They did further mischief by running into another cart, but without doing any serious damage. There is little use reproaching the dead, but it would have been a good thing for this poor coachman and others if he had been as good a whip and

possessed of as steady nerves as the late Mr. Selby. If he had only stuck to his post—as every coachman should in such circumstances—this sad accident might have been averted.

While I was on this Mail there was a dreadful flood all over the country. I think it was in the year 1852. The rivers were so swollen, particularly the Severn and the Wye, that it was difficult to get along the roads. Leaving Gloucester at midnight on one occasion, all went on pretty well until the coach reached Lugg Bridge, four miles from Hereford, or rather the place where the bridge had been, for it had been washed away in the night, and the coach, going along quickly, fell into the rushing stream. Horses, coach, and coachman, the guard (whose name was Couldry) and one passenger were carried down the river about a mile and a half. The coachman caught hold of one of the leaders which had broken loose, and he and the horse were carried some distance and washed into a field, where the animal was able to regain its footing. The other three

horses were drowned. The guard and the passenger managed to catch hold of a tree as they floated down stream, and were rescued after being some hours in the water, but unfortunately the passenger died some days after from the effects of his immersion. On the following night I had a very unpleasant experience of the flood. Coming within a mile and a half of Gloucester, we found the water had risen considerably since the morning; so much so that the coachman would not venture to proceed unless someone went first to see what was the depth. I got down and walked for about a hundred yards, with the water up to my armpits, and called to them to come on, which they did; but unfortunately for me they did not stop to pick me up, and there I was left for full three hours on a dark night, in the water, surrounded by it on all sides, and afraid to move one way or another for fear of getting out of my depth. At last, almost in despair, I did make an effort, and with great difficulty managed to get to Gloucester, where I was put to bed and between warm blankets.

On another occasion on the same Mail we escaped with our lives in an almost miraculous manner. This happened in passing over Plinlimmon. It was a fearful night. The snow had been falling for hours before we got to the top of the mountain at Stedfa-gerrig, and after going for about a mile downhill we found ourselves enveloped in a dense fog and snow-storm. We completely lost our way, although we had a postboy in front as guide, but unfortunately he missed the road and took us over a precipice about 60 feet deep. The coachman and I, without any effort on our part, performed the acrobatic feat of turning two complete somersaults before we reached the bottom. I remember distinctly that my one thought was how I could avoid being crushed under the falling coach. We both escaped this, however, and, owing to the depth of the snow, were quite unhurt by the fall, though much shaken of course. The two inside passengers were cut about a good deal by the glass of the windows, and two of the horses were killed. The next thing was to right the coach and get the living horses loose, which was an

extremely difficult thing to do, as the snow was very deep at the bottom. It took us two hours to get things together again, and fortunately we discovered that there was an old Roman road near where we were, so at last we got started, and made up a good deal of time before we got to Cheltenham, arriving there just in time to catch the up London Mail. An account of this accident was given in the *Hereford Times* newspaper.

And yet another winter adventure on this Mail. We had left Gloucester, and all went on pretty well until we came to Radnor Forest, where we got caught in such a snow-storm that it was impossible to take the coach any further, so we left it. I took the Mail bags, and, with the assistance of two shepherds, made my way over the mountains. It took us five hours to get over to the other side to an inn at Llandewy. There we met the up Mail Guard Couldry, who took my guides back again. It was not many hours before the abandoned coach was completely covered with snow, and there it remained buried for a week. Well, the

up guard Couldry fell down in the snow from exhaustion, and had to be carried by the two shepherds to the Forest Inn on the other side of the mountain. There he remained some days to recover himself. I had to proceed with my bags, so I got a chaise and pair from Penybont and another at Rhayader, but was unable to take that very far owing to the snow. There was nothing for it but to press on again on foot, which I did for many miles until I came to Llangerrig. There I found it was hopeless to think of going over Plinlimmon, and was informed that nothing had crossed all day, so I made up my mind to go round by way of Llanidloes, and a night I had of it! I was almost tired out, and benumbed with cold, which brought on a drowsiness I found it very hard to resist. If I had yielded to the feeling for an instant I should not have been telling these tales now. When I got about eight miles from Aberystwith I found myself becoming thoroughly exhausted, so I hired a car for the remainder of the journey, and fell fast asleep as soon as I got into it. On arriving at Aberystwith I was still sound asleep, and had

to be carried to bed and a doctor sent for, who rubbed me for hours before he could get my blood into circulation again. I had then been exposed to that terrible weather for fifty hours. Next day I felt a good deal better and started back for Gloucester, but had great difficulty in getting over the mountain. Again I had the honour of receiving a letter from the Postmaster-General, complimenting me on my zeal and energy in getting the Mail over the mountain. Even when there was no snow, the wind on the top of Plinlimmon was often almost more than we could contend with. Once, indeed, it was so strong that it blew the coach completely over against a rock, but we soon got that right again, and always afterwards took the precaution of opening both the doors and tying them back, so that the wind might pass through the coach. Altogether I had good reason to remember Plinlimmon, and, after all I have undergone in that country in the way of floods and snow-storms, it is little wonder if I am troubled with rheumatism now.

In 1854 the Mail Coach from Gloucester to Aberystwith ceased running, and I was transferred to the London and Exeter Railway. I travelled upon that line, working the Mail Bag Apparatus and sorting and delivering the Mail bags, until the year 1861, when I was placed at Paddington Station. There I have been ever since, despatching and receiving Mail bags and superintending the Parcel Post work at the station since its commencement. It will be seen, therefore, that I have worked for eighteen years on Mail Coaches, seven years on the railway, and thirty years at Paddington Station.

I have often been asked if I had any encounters with highwaymen in my coaching days. Many people seem to have an idea that the stoppage of Mail Coaches by Dick Turpin and his followers was an event of frequent occurrence. All I can say is that in my experience of the road nothing of the kind ever happened to my coach except once, and then I was like to have done myself more injury than the highwaymen did. It was in the year 1836, when I was

travelling on the Bristol and Portsmouth Mail. One night, between Bath and Warminster, two men jumped out of the hedge; one caught hold of the leaders, and the other the wheelers, and tried to stop the coach. My coachman immediately whipped up the horses and called out to me, saying "Look out! we are going to be robbed!" I took the blunderbuss out of the sword case (which was a box just in front of the guard's seat); but, just as I did so, I saw the fellows making towards the hedge, and then lost sight of them altogether. To let them know that I was prepared I fired off into the hedge. I don't know whether I hit anything; I heard no cries or groans; but I do know that the recoil of the blunderbuss nearly knocked me off my seat. I have had many hard knocks in my time, but that blunderbuss kicked like a mule. No doubt it was loaded to the muzzle, as was usual with those weapons.

Occasionally of late years I have been reminded of my old coaching days. A few years ago the Marquess of Worcester kindly invited me to go down with him to Brighton

by coach. On the journey I was able to tell the Marquess that I knew the late Duke of Beaufort, who used very often to take the reins between Gloucester and Hereford when going down to one of his country seats in Monmouthshire. A splendid whip he was too. It was quite a treat to ride behind him, and every coachman and guard was pleased to see him, he was so affable and pleasant to all.

One of the Wards — I think it was Harry — used to drive me on the “Quicksilver” Exeter Mail, on which I acted as guard for a short period.

I don't know that I notice very much change in the manners and habits of people from what they were in my younger days. As regards my Post Office work, however, the change has been most wonderful, and at Christmas time the Mails despatched by me from Paddington to places on the Great Western Line have grown to be a hundredfold of the quantity we used to carry by coach.

M. J. NOBBS

OTHER COACHING INCIDENTS.

COACHES IN SNOW-STORMS.

THE great snow-storm of Christmas, 1836, was long remembered as one of the most severe on record, and Mr. Nobbs' coach was only one of many that had to be abandoned owing to the depth of the snow-drifts. All over England, and in Scotland as well, most of the roads were rendered impassable. Some coaches, after proceeding for miles on their journey, were forced to return; thus the Brighton Mail from London had to put back after getting as far as Crawley, and the Dover Mail got no further than Gravesend. Other coaches were upset, and some were completely lost, having been abandoned, and afterwards buried in the snow-wreaths. Near Chatham the snow lay to a depth of 30 or 40 feet, and on some of the roads in the Midlands, after cuttings had been made, the snow was banked to the height of 50 feet. A full account of this and other memorable snowstorms will be found in Mr.

Wilson Hyde's most interesting book, "The Royal Mail."

History repeats itself, and more than fifty years after that 1836 storm we again find Mail Coaches blocked by the snow on the Brighton road. The severe snow-storm of the 9th and 10th of March last taxed the resources of the Post Office in the South and West of England to the utmost. For several days Plymouth was virtually without any service of Mails, and one after another came an apparently endless series of telegrams to headquarters in London, bearing dismal tidings of trains buried in mammoth drifts, cuttings blocked with snow, and portentous "accumulations" of parcel receptacles at places quite unprepared to bear so large a share of the Post Office burden. The trials and triumphs of that stirring time have, however, already found a capable chronicler — as readers of the *St. Martin's-le-Grand Magazine* will shortly discover. All we would refer to here is the fact that the up and down Brighton Parcel Coaches were both blocked by snow at Handcross Hill, about four miles from

Crawley—one at the top of the hill and the other at the bottom. The resources of civilisation in 1891, however, afforded a means of overcoming the difficulty which was not open to our fathers and grand-fathers in 1836. An experienced officer (Mr. W. Roberts) went down from London by train and superintended the digging out of the coaches. This done, he had both vehicles taken to Crawley, where the parcel baskets were transferred to the railway. In 1836 those parcels would probably not have reached their destination under a week or ten days.

BRIDGE DISASTER TO COACH.

Mr. Nobbs' graphic account of the Lugg Bridge accident recalls the more calamitous one which befell the Glasgow and Carlisle coach on the 25th October, 1801. The circumstances were alike in both cases, but the results of the earlier disaster were much more grave. The bridge was one spanning the river Evan, between Elvanfoot and Beattock; it had collapsed under

stress of a flood following a sudden thaw, and at about ten o'clock at night the coach plunged into the rocky bed of the stream. Two outside passengers were killed on the spot, and the coachman sustained such injuries that he died some days afterwards. The inside passengers, a lady and three gentlemen, and the guard, escaped with injuries more or less severe. Three of the horses were killed, and the coach was smashed to pieces.

ROBBERY OF MAILS.

If Mr. Nobbs had been on the road some twenty or thirty years earlier he might have acquired a larger experience of the manners and customs of highwaymen — or perhaps we should say mail robbers, — for the picturesque highwayman of romance is conspicuously absent from Post Office annals. In this connexion it may be interesting to give the text of two or three Post Office Notices issued early in the century. This one is typical of many others circulated about the same time: —

General Post Office,
Tuesday, 27th October, 1812.

About 7 o'clock on the Evening of Monday the 26th instant, the LEEDS Mail-Coach was robbed of the Bags of Letters for London, described at Foot, between Kettering and Higham Ferrers, and within 3 Miles of Higham Ferrers, by forcing the Lock of the Mail Box.

The Bags stolen are,

Halifax of the	25th.	Chesterfield	ditto
Bradford	ditto	Mansfield	Ditto
Leeds	ditto	Nottingham	26th.
Wakefield	ditto	Melton Mowbray	Ditto
Huddersfield	ditto	Oakham	Ditto
Barnsley	ditto	Uppingham	Ditto
Sheffield	ditto	Kettering	Ditto
Rotherham	ditto	Thrapstone	Ditto

Whoever shall apprehend the Person or Persons who committed the said Robbery, will be entitled to a Reward of

TWO HUNDRED POUNDS,

one Moiety to be paid on Commitment for Trial, and the other Moiety on Conviction. If an Accomplice in the Robbery will surrender himself and make Discovery, whereby one or more of the Persons concerned therein shall be apprehended and brought to Justice, such Discoverer will be entitled to the said Reward, and be admitted in Evidence for the Crown.

By Command of the Postmaster-General,
F. FREELING, Secretary.

Four months later we have a minute description of the “knight of the road” who was supposed to have committed the robbery:—

General Post Office,
February 9th, 1813.

200 POUNDS REWARD.

Whereas

HUFFEY WHITE is strongly suspected to have been concerned in the Robbery of the *Leeds Mail*, between *Kettering* and *Higham Ferrers*, on Monday Evening, the 26th of October last: whoever shall apprehend, or cause him to be apprehended, will be paid a Reward of ONE HUNDRED POUNDS upon his Commitment for Trial, and the further Reward of ONE HUNDRED POUNDS upon his Conviction.

By Command of the Postmaster-General,
FRANCIS FREELING, Secretary.

The said HUFFEY WHITE, is a Native of *London*, by Trade a Cabinet Maker, about 35 or 36 Years of Age, of good Appearance, 5 Feet 8 or 9 Inches high, stoutish made, and stands very upright, has thin Legs, brown Hair, broad

or full Forehead, Pale Complexion, light grey Eyes, and little Eyebrows, is marked with the Small-Pox in large Pits deep in the Skin, and at some distance from each other; his Nose turns up. He has a Squeaking Voice, is mild in manners, and does not talk much. He is well known at all the *Police Offices*.

He had formerly served some Years on Board the Hulks, and returned about 10 Years since.

About four Years ago he was capitally convicted at the *Old Bailey*, and ordered to be transported for Life, but afterwards made his Escape.

About twelve Months after this Conviction he was apprehended at *Stockport*, and tried and convicted at *Chester Assizes* for his Escape, and sent back to the Hulks, but again escaped.

He afterwards robbed the *Paisley Union Bank*, and immediately proceeded to *London* by way of *Edinburgh*, in Post Chaises; and in two or three Days after his arrival, was apprehended

in Surrey, and tried and convicted at *Kingston Lent Assizes*, 1811, for being at large, and was sent to the Hulks.

From thence he again escaped, and has since been in the Counties of *Cambridge, Huntingdon, and Northampton*, passing by the Name of WALLIS, until the Robbery of the *Leeds Mail* the 26th of October last.

It is not known where he has been since, except that he was at the *Bull's Head*, in *Bread Street*, for two or three Days immediately afterwards, and then went to Bath. He slept at the *Swan Inn* in *Birmingham* on Sunday the 24th of January last, and proceeded the next Day in Company with Robert Brady, otherwise called Oxford Bob, in the *Shrewsbury Mail* to *Wolverhampton*, where Brady was apprehended, and White took the opportunity to quit the Coach.

March 29th, 1813.

Huffey White was at Bristol in the last Week, and escaped from thence on Saturday the 27th instant about Noon, in company with one Richard Haywood.

White was dressed in a Blue under Coat, with gilt Buttons, White Waistcoat, Blue Pantaloons, and a Yellow Belcher Handkerchief about his Neck.

Haywood was dressed in a Light Loose Great Coat (had no Hat) and a Yellow Belcher Handkerchief. He is about 35 or 36 Years of Age, 5 Feet 10 Inches high, Stout made, and is pitted with the Small Pox.

Two of their Companions, Birkett and John Goodman, were secured, in whose possession there was found every apparatus for opening Locks and forcing Doors.

That is decidedly disappointing. The name is very unromantic, to begin with, and the description does not suggest a person of unusually prepossessing appearance. We miss, too, the gold lace and ruffles, the cocked hat, and – most important of all – the mysterious

mask with which we were wont to adorn the dashing highwayman of our youthful fancies. There is no horse either. Fancy Dick Turpin without Black Bess! It will strike everyone, however, that for a gentleman who presumably was not desirous of attracting too much attention, "Huffey White's" attire was somewhat "loud."

Talking of horses, we may give a notice, nine years later in date, which shows how the Claude Duvals of the period provided themselves with steeds.

Post Office, York,
Monday Evening, 11th March, 1822.

50 POUNDS REWARD.

Whereas

The POST BOY conveying the MAIL from WHITBY to MALTON, was, about Three o'Clock this Afternoon, stopt on the Road, about Fourteen Miles from WHITBY, by a Man, who pulled the Rider from his Horse,

and mounted it himself, and immediately rode off across the Moor towards Lockton, with the Mail Bags for London, York, and other Places.

Whoever shall apprehend the Person who has committed this FELONY, will be entitled to the above Reward. Twenty Pounds, Part thereof, payable on his Commitment for Trial, and the remaining Thirty Pounds upon his Conviction.

The highwayman's lot in those days, like the policeman's in ours, was not altogether "a happy one." If caught — as he generally was in the long run — he was granted very short shrift. In fact there are instances recorded in which, the robbery, capture, examination by magistrate, trial, sentence, and execution were all comprised in the space of one week. There was nothing "leaden-footed" about that justice.

MAIL COACHMEN AND MAIL GUARDS.

Mr. Nobbs' reference to the skill of the present Duke of Beaufort's father as a "whip," a skill

which seems to be hereditary in that family, reminds us of the fact that the same nobleman, while Marquess of Worcester, habitually drove the "Beaufort" coach on the Brighton Road. The "Age" coach, on the same road, was driven by Sir Vincent Cotton, and the Hon. Fred. Jerningham acted as coachman to the Brighton day mail. It would appear, therefore, that in the days when stage coaching was a serious business, aristocratic amateurs of four-in-hand driving were as much in evidence as they are now. Many of them were, of course, unknown to their passengers, and the historians of the old coaching days allege that they were in the habit of pocketing their tips in a matter-of-course manner which would have done credit to the oldest regular coachman on the road.

But it was the guard who was the person of greatest importance on a Mail Coach, and he was generally fully conscious of his own dignity, and inclined to "stand upon" it on the slightest provocation. It was necessary, however, that the guards should be men of

strict probity, as they were often entrusted with commissions of great consequence, such as the conveyance of large sums of money for bankers, &c. Moreover, they were principally dependent for their income upon fees received from the public, and in some cases, it is said, those fees amounted to as much as 300*l.* a year. It is obvious that this system was one that opened a door to corruption and abuse had the guards been unscrupulous men. The payment made to them by the Post Office was but half a guinea, a week — a sort of retaining fee — or just sufficient, with the uniform, to mark them as servants of the Department. Thus, when the Post Office guards began to be employed on the railways, the Postmaster-General had to apply to the Treasury for authority to pay them in salaries, “inasmuch as it was clear that they would have no chance of obtaining fees.” Some time afterwards the Postmaster-General made a second application to the Treasury, stating “that on certain lines of road, owing to the competition of the railways (with the coaches), the number of passengers by coaches was greatly reduced, and that, consequently,

the guards had lost many of their fees.” Thereupon the Treasury granted permission to pay the guards employed on coaches, in certain cases, at the same rate as the Post Office guards on the railways.

The Stage Coach system was already in its decline when Mr. Nobbs took up duty in 1836. In 1837 – the year of Her Majesty’s Accession – 52 Mail Guards were appointed; in 1840, 19; in 1843, only 1. The total number of Mail Guards in the United Kingdom in 1841 was 365; in 1843 it had fallen to 327.

It has been pointed out by a recent writer that the Mail Bag Apparatus now in use on the railways had its prototype in the days of the stage coaches, when the Mail bags were held out on the end of a stick to be clutched by the guard as the coach hurried past. Many of these exchanges were, of course, made in the night, and a former officer of the Surveying Staff in the North of Scotland vouches for the truth of the following anecdote. At one of the offices in Caithness – Dunbeath, he believes – the coach

used to pass very early in the morning, and the Sub-Postmaster was in the habit of keeping the bags ready for despatch in his bedroom. The blowing of the horn warned him of the approach of the coach, and the guard used to come and receive the bags out of the bedroom window. Once, on a dark rainy night, the guard was handed what he supposed to be the Mail bags, and the coach proceeded some little distance on its way, when, to his disgust, the guard discovered that instead of Mail bags he was carrying off a portion of the Sub-Postmaster's apparel. The coach was turned back, and once more, to his astonishment, the sleepy Sub-Postmaster heard the tootle of the horn and hastened to the window to inquire what might be the matter. "Hey, mon!" shouted the guard, "gie's the bags an' tak' in yer breeks!" Needless to say the incident afforded the passengers much amusement.

In taking leave of the last of the old Mail Coach Guards we may quote from a recent issue of the *Daily Telegraph* the following paragraph

relative to one who was perhaps the oldest surviving stage coachman: —

“One of the olden time has passed away in William Clements of Canterbury, who, before the present century had reached its twenties, drove the famous ‘Tally-ho’ Coach which plied between the Cathedral City and Gracechurch Street. More than once he had to run the gauntlet of robbers and highwaymen, of whom, however, he had a decidedly low opinion. Railways killed his Coach. Clements reluctantly admitted the superiority of the iron horse to his own teams, although he never relinquished the idea that England’s degeneracy commenced when the ‘Tally-ho’ and other coaches were vanquished by ‘Puffing Billy.’ He died in his ninety-first year, and perhaps is entitled to be called the ‘Last of the Whips.’”

Mr. Clements was not, however, the “Last of the Whips.” While these sheets were passing through the press we had the pleasure of an interview with another veteran, Mr. Harry

Ward, of whom mention is made on page 35. Mr. Ward states that he is 78 years of age, though, judging by his hale and active appearance, one would pronounce him to be ten years younger. He drove the London and Glasgow Mail so far back as the year 1833, at which time he was the youngest coachman on the road. Mr. Ward assures us that in all his fifty years' experience he never had an accident to his coach. To the remark that this must surely be a unique record, he replied, with pardonable pride, that he was reckoned "the champion coachman" of his time. Such was his fame, indeed, that after the London and Exeter Coach had twice met with serious mishaps, some of the leading inhabitants of Devon and Cornwall sent a strongly worded memorial to the authorities, asking that Harry Ward might be placed on the box; and he was transferred accordingly. Mr. Ward, whose memory is wonderfully clear, has a distinct recollection of the great snow-storm of 1836, when his coach was one of several that were snowed up on Salisbury Plain. He, too, knew the members of the Beaufort family well;

indeed it was he who taught the present scions of that house the “art and mystery” of four-in-hand driving. We are glad to be able to add that Mr. Ward is in good health, and still quite capable of managing a team.



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