

PROCEEDINGS
OF THE
CAMBRIDGE ANTIQUARIAN
SOCIETY

(INCORPORATING THE CAMBS & HUNTS
ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY)



VOLUME LXVIII

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IMRAY LAURIE NORIE AND WILSON

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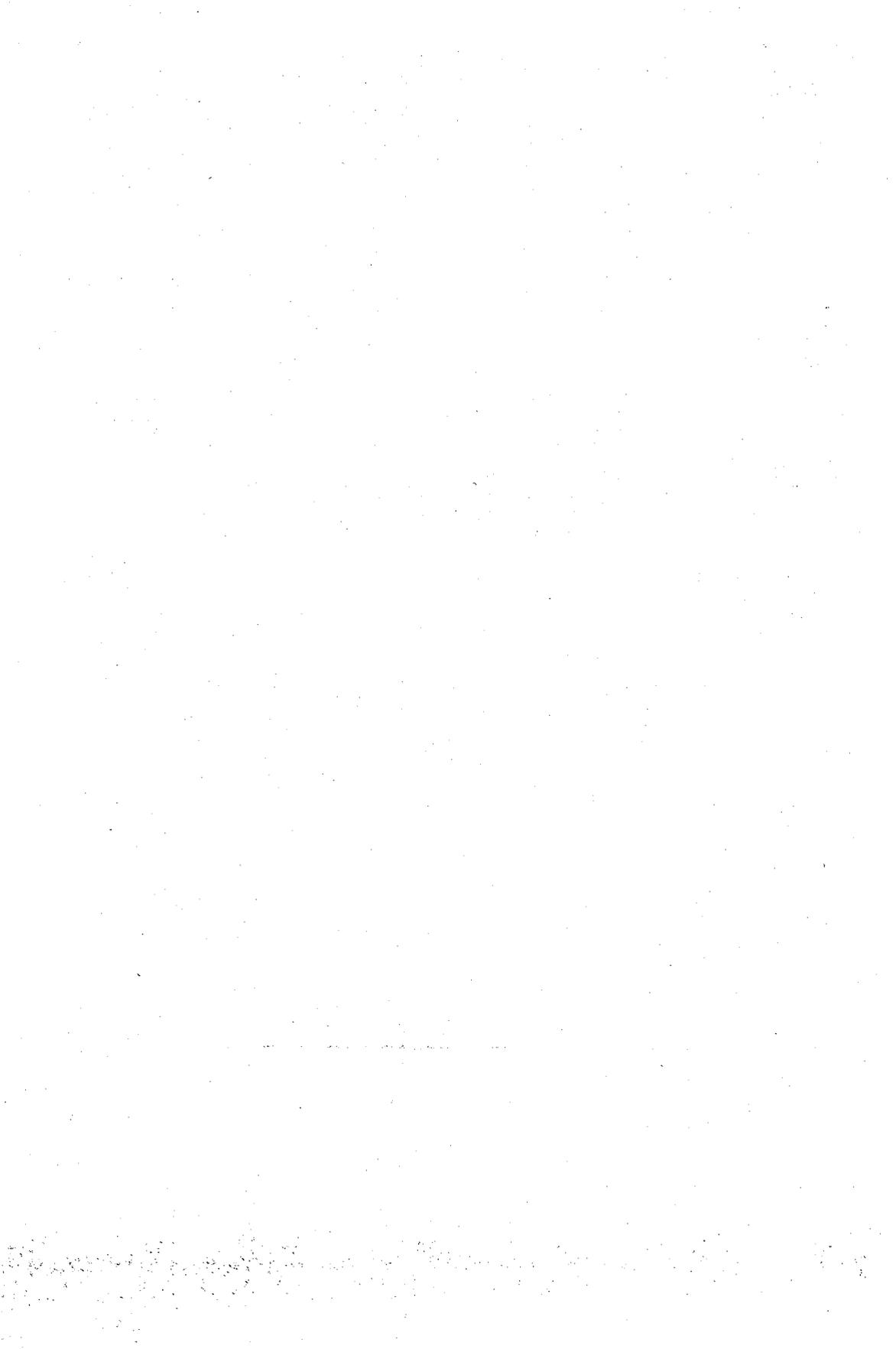
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COACHING ROUTES OF THE CAMBRIDGE REGION, 1820-1850*

David H. Kennett

Cambridge lies at the centre of an agricultural region: rural in its concerns, placid in its outlook, temperate in its moods. Yet the city, beyond the university, had a vitality all of its own. It is true today: it was much more true in the rural world of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The rural world was remote, connected by water and by roads, but not yet by rail. For goods in Cambridge and its immediate region, water was more often used than road, but the carrier's cart was important to the local and regional economy. For passengers, there was the cart, which if they were conveyed at all would have been the mode of travel for the poor, and for the better-off there was the coach.

The coach was an essential element of the rural world, at least in its last generation. Its heyday was short, for though coaches were known in the eighteenth century, they were not common. It was only for one generation, perhaps a little more, that the stage coach held sway on the roads of England. That generation was the thirty years between 1820 and 1850. By 1850, the era of the stage coach had passed: the advent of the faster, more punctual steam train killed the stage coach in the course of the ten years after 1838. It still survived in remote areas, to which the railway had not yet penetrated, but essentially by the time the Great Exhibition was held in London in 1851, the stage coach was not a means of transport to be reckoned as an essential part of the rural economy.

However, for most of the preceding thirty years, the stage coach had been an integral part of the economy, not just of rural England but also of the towns, both large and small, which generated coaching traffic and passengers to fill them.

In this, the third of a series of papers on the coaching routes of England, the routes found in the Cambridge region between 1820 and 1850 will be examined. It relies heavily on the printed directories of the period for its information. Cambridgeshire was covered by the firm of James Pigot of Manchester (later controlled by Isaac Slater) in 1823, 1830, 1839 and 1850. The adjacent counties of Bedfordshire, Huntingdonshire and Suffolk were covered in the same volumes. Norfolk was included in the three last and in the companion volume to the first which was issued in 1822. Hertfordshire, the other county within the Cambridge region, was covered by Pigot and Slater in 1823, 1826-7 reissued in 1828-9, and 1832-4. Northamptonshire was included in the issues of

* This paper is essentially based on directories of the period: for details not otherwise cited individually in the notes, see 'Note on the Sources'.

Pigot's directories for 1823 and 1830 and also in those for 1841 and 1850 issued by Isaac Slater. As Northamptonshire¹ and Norfolk² have been the subjects of papers within this field, every attempt has been made to concentrate on aspects which were not included within those two studies. Some duplication is inevitable, but the present paper seeks primarily to give an account of the coaching routes of the Cambridge region.

The coaching routes of the Cambridge region can, as with any other area, be divided into those which are of a long-distance nature, those which connect the region with adjacent regions, and those routes leading to the important local centre. Before turning to the detail of each of these, it is worth remarking on the general nature of the road pattern of the Cambridge region.³ To the west is the Great North Road. This is not one road, but two, one of which has a variant route. One branch of the Great North Road runs from London through Barnet, Hatfield, Welwyn, Stevenage, Baldock, Biggleswade, St Neots and Huntingdon to Stilton and beyond. The other main branch goes from London to Hoddesdon, Ware, Puckeridge, Buntingford, Royston, and Huntingdon to Stilton and beyond. A variant of this follows the same route to Royston, branches off to Cambridge and then rejoins the main route at Huntingdon. In East Anglia there are the three roads to Norwich. One goes out through Romford, Chelmsford, Colchester and Ipswich to Scole Inn and Norwich. The second follows this route to Chelmsford and then proceeds via Braintree, Halstead, Sudbury, Long Melford and Bury St Edmunds and then on via Ixworth, Botesdale, Diss and Scole to Norwich. The third of the routes from London to Norwich is the modern A 11, through Epping, Harlow, Hockerill (or Bishop's Stortford), Great Chesterford, Newmarket, Thetford, Attleborough and Wymondham to Norwich. A slight variant is to go via Bury St Edmunds between Newmarket and Thetford. (Fig. 1).

Coaching routes from London to Norwich followed each of these three main routes and the variant was chosen by one of the two Norwich *Royal Mail* coaches: the other went through Ipswich. In discussing the coaching routes of the Cambridge Region, it is important to note that though the region was affected by coaches to Norwich, no coach from London to Norwich went through Cambridge itself. In fact Cambridge had only limited direct communication by coach with much of East Anglia. Though the map of coaching routes between Cambridge and other towns and cities shows a route from Cambridge to Norwich, the *East Anglian*, this was a very late innovation, recorded only in William White's *History, Gazetteer and Directory of Norfolk, 1845*.

Even despite its lack of direct services to Norwich, Cambridge was one of the major coaching towns of England: others were as varied at Daventry and Towcester, Shrewsbury and Litchfield, Northampton and Leicester. It is perhaps significant that Cambridge is a town where the coaching inns were demolished in the late nineteenth century and F. A. Reeve's volume has no fewer than thirteen photographs showing old inns now demolished.⁴

Coaching services relied on inns, to provide horses, to permit travellers to alight, and to offer refreshment; often innkeepers were among those who invested their money in coaching services. At Hitchin, a Hertfordshire town on the fringe of the region, John Kershaw kept the now demolished Swan Inn on the old Market Place. He also ran a

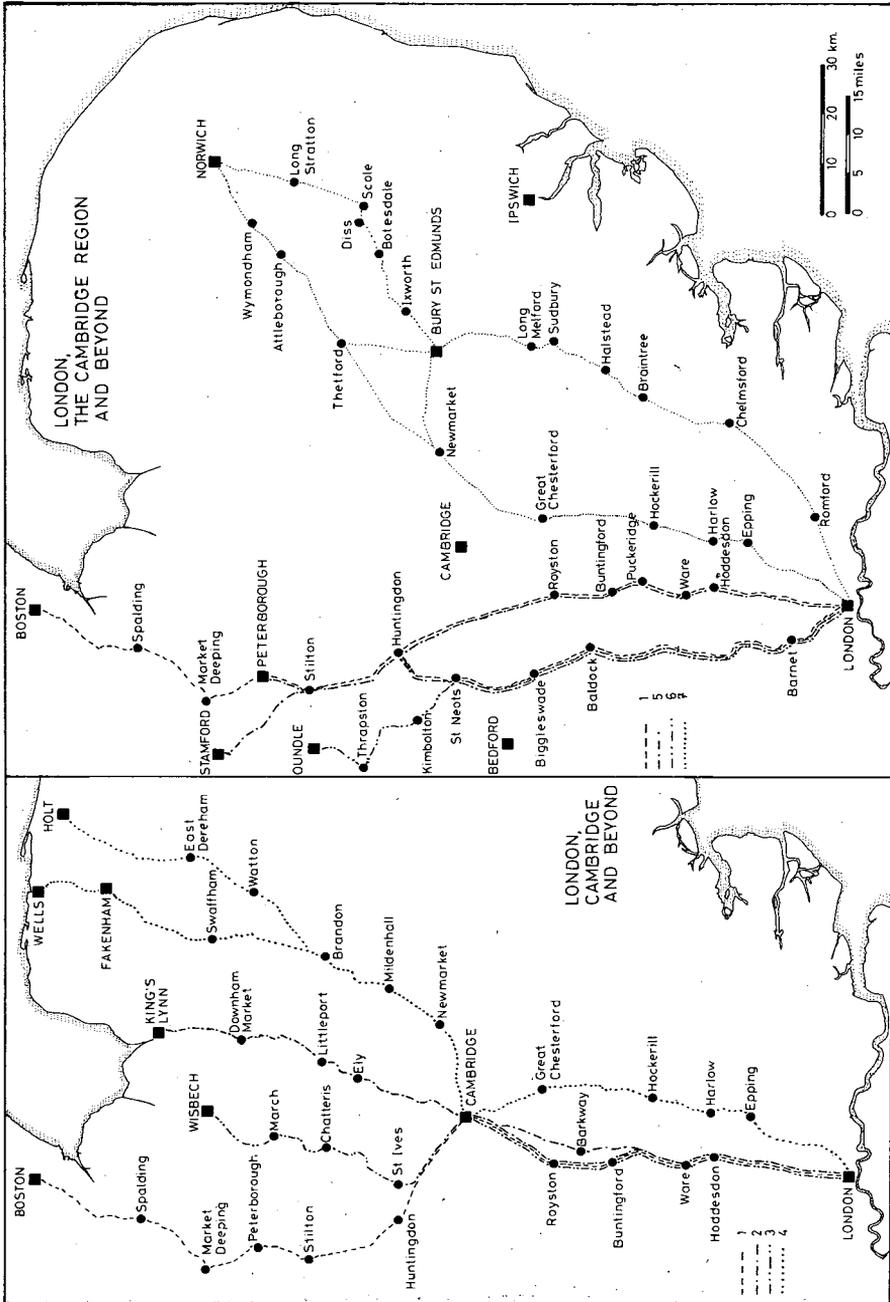


Fig. 1. Coaching routes to London from the Cambridge Region and Beyond, showing routes through and avoiding Cambridge. Key to routes:- 1. London - Boston 2. London - Kings Lynn 3. London - Wisbech 4. London - North - west Norfolk towns 5. London - Stamford and Peterborough 6. London - Oundle 7. London - Norwich Routes from London to Cambridge follow each of Routes 1 - 4.

coach from Hitchin to London and another from Baldock to London and had at least one spare vehicle, since it was hired for a few days by a Bedford coaching enterprise in 1804.⁵ John Kershaw was a single owner and other instances of a man investing in coaching are known. Thomas Finch was a grocer in Luton who organised the *Industry* omnibus to London via Wheathampstead, Hatfield and Barnet.⁶ It was often a lucrative trade. A Leighton Buzzard man, William Pyne, who is described in his will as a "Coach Proprietor", was assessed at probate in 1829 to have goods to the value under £3000. As he left monetary bequests of £1800, with a house and residue to his wife, he cannot be regarded as anything other than among the wealthiest inhabitants of the town of Leighton Buzzard.⁷ However for some men it was not a profitable investment. John Rawlins, a Bedford wine merchant, had interests both in a coach from Bedford to London via Hitchin and in another from Kettering to London through Bedford and Hitchin, but he became increasingly dissatisfied with the ventures and seems to have shed his commitments in 1814 and 1815 respectively.⁸ Among his partners were innkeepers at the Sun in Hitchin, first Elizabeth Barry and later Samuel Hill. The latter in 1814 was invited to participate in a venture from Boston to London intended to run through Peterborough and Hitchin.⁹ Though this seems never to have materialised, it is typical of the schemes by which many of the coaching services of England were organised: a group of men, often with connections with the drink trade, got together as a partnership to organise a coach to run from the most outward town to London, via each of the different towns in which they resided.

Often the successful amongst these ventures were taken over by one of the big firms in the coaching world, but not always. B. W. Horne & Co. had a large enterprise in 1836, and others were the empires of William Chaplin and Co. and Edward Sherman and Co. This concentration of power into a few hands led to intense rivalry, not always to the benefit of the passengers.

In the harsh economics of coaching in the early nineteenth century, with the intense rivalry of the larger concerns, the growing competition of the railways, and the need for close working relationships between the partners, it is surprising how many of the small concerns, often with only a single coach, survived until their services were no longer needed. Almost all the routes shown on Figure 3 are of this type and the economic organisation of that from Oundle would have been similar.

The route from Oundle to London varied little: it attracted more than one enterprise, none perhaps of any great duration. In 1836, a coach called the *Regulator* left Oundle on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays for a journey via Thrapston, Kimbolton, St Neots, Biggleswade, Baldock, Stevenage, Welwyn, Hatfield, and Barnet to London. It left at 07.00 and arrived 10 hours later, after a journey of 85 miles (133 km). The return journey began at the George and Blue Boar in Holborn at 07.00 on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays. The route had attracted other enterprises. Two were recorded in 1823, the *Old Oundle* and the *Regulator*.

Stamford and Peterborough also attracted coaches to London. Stamford provides the perfect example of the use of more than one portion of the Great North Road by different coaches. In 1830, the *Defiance* left Huntingdon at 10.00 for Cambridge,

Royston, Buntingford, Ware and Hoddesdon on its way to London, but this coach is not recorded among those entered for Cambridge in that year. The route via Cambridge from Stamford seems only to have been temporary, for in 1836 and in 1839, the *Defiance* is recorded as going on the straight route from Huntingdon to Royston, but in both years it is noted as travelling south on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays and north on the alternate days. In 1830, the *Regent* from Stamford, which in 1823 had begun in Melton Mowbray, was recorded as leaving Huntingdon at 10.00. It was then daily in both directions, but by 1836 it too ran in one direction on each day. This coach went north on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays and south through Huntingdon, Biggleswade and Baldock on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays. The two combined to give a daily service from Stamford to London. In 1839, both left Huntingdon at 11.00, and the *Defiance* had a branch coach from Stilton to Peterborough.

The Angel Inn at Stilton was typical of the many wayside places dependent on the coaching trade. The directory writer noted "coaches call at the Angel Inn, daily" without being specific. Among the services provided were those of hospitality and repairs to wheels, shoeing of horses and extensive stabling of spare teams to be hitched to a coach within a minute.

Apart from the branch coach of the *Defiance* in 1839, Peterborough never had a service exclusively to itself, but was served by the coaches from Boston and east Lincolnshire. The so called Boston *Royal Mail* from 1830 at least went on to Alford, Louth and Grimsby, before going from Boston to Spalding, Market Deeping and Peterborough. Thereafter its route varied. In 1830, it followed the Cambridge route, with the up journey calling at the George, Huntingdon at 24.00 and the down journey going through the same inn at 02.15. The times at the Post Office in Royston were 02.00 for the journey to London and 24.00 for the journey from London. The routes from Boston to London are varied, and even the *Royal Mail* coach moved. By 1836, it is found on the route through Royston, avoiding Cambridge and in 1839, the Boston *Royal Mail* left the Red Lion in Royston at 01.30 and the George in Huntingdon at 02.30. There were other coaches from Boston to London. The *Perseverance* in 1839 went south on a route leaving Huntingdon at 11.30, Biggleswade at 14.00 and Baldock at 15.00. The *Royal Mail* and the *Perseverance* were the two most long-lived of the coaches from Boston to London, being recorded as early as 1822 and surviving until the railway drove them out of business in the 1840s. There were others at various times. A coach called the *Monarch* ran south in 1830 on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, and used the route via Cambridge and Royston.

Peterborough was also on the route of coaches from Barton-on-Humber (the ferry point for Hull) which came south through Lincoln. They all used the route through Biggleswade and Baldock and mostly seem to have avoided going into Huntingdon; none made the detour to Cambridge. But Cambridge was briefly, in 1830, on the route of the Edinburgh *Royal Mail*, though this is recorded only at Huntingdon. At Royston, this is stated to have gone through Huntingdon, Stamford, Grantham, Doncaster, Ferrybridge, Boroughbridge, Durham, Newcastle and Berwick, while a Glasgow *Royal Mail* left St Neots at 24.00 for Stilton, Stamford, Grantham, Newark,

Doncaster, Ferrybridge, Leeds, Harrogate, Appleby, Carlisle, Eccleshaw, Bentock Bridge, Moffat and Glasgow.¹⁰ Both still survived in 1836 and in 1839.

For the Cambridge region, however, these very long-distance connections are few. Royston in 1830 was on the route of a coach called the *Wellington* to Newcastle, and Baldock retained two coaches to Leeds and one to York as late as 1839. Most towns though were on routes to no further than 120 miles (192 km) from London. The geography of East Anglia alone dictates that. Cambridge, for instance, had coach services from London to Wisbech, King's Lynn and the north Norfolk towns of Wells, Fakenham and Holt. Not each service ran every day.

There was for long a *Royal Mail* service through Cambridge. When that to Edinburgh and that to Boston stopped using Cambridge, but went instead on the direct route from Royston to Huntingdon, a *Royal Mail* service to King's Lynn was instituted. This left London at 19.30, arrived at the Red Lion in Royston at 01.45, reached the George in Cambridge at 02.00 and went on to the Bell at Ely at 03.45 and the Swan at Downham Market at 05.30, and presumably reached King's Lynn at 06.30. The return journey left the Crown at King's Lynn at 19.15, arrived in Downham Market at 20.15, reached Ely at 22.15 and Cambridge at 24.00. In 1839, there was also a *Branch Royal Mail* coach, leaving Cambridge at 02.00, St Ives at 03.30, Chatteris at 05.00, March at 06.00, Wisbech at 07.30 and going on to Holbeach. The return journey left Holbeach at 16.30, Wisbech at 18.30, March at 20.00, Chatteris at 21.00, and St Ives at 22.00 for Cambridge where it awaited the Lynn *Royal Mail*.

King's Lynn was never a great coaching centre: its prosperity was based on water, both the sea and the river. However, in 1839, as in 1830, a coach called the *Union* left King's Lynn at 07.00 for London. It reached Cambridge at 13.00 and then proceeded via Barkway to Ware, Hoddesdon and London. This route was also used by one coach from Cambridge to London, the *Telegraph* of 1830, which left the Sun Inn, Cambridge, at 10.00 and the Golden Cross at Charing Cross at 09.00 daily. The other coaches from Cambridge used other routes. The *Star* left the Sun Inn on Trinity Street and afterwards called at the Hoop on Sidney Street at 06.00 but on Mondays left at 05.00. Like the *Defiance* which left the Black Bear at 07.00 it followed the usual route through Melbourn, Royston, Buntingford, Puckeridge, Ware and Hoddesdon. Coaches from Wisbech, the *Day* going south on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays and the *Defiance* on the alternate days, used this route also. These left Wisbech at 07.00, March at 08.00, Chatteris at 09.00, St Ives at 10.00 and Cambridge at 12.00. Royston was reached at 13.30 and Buntingford at 14.00. The last recorded timing is Ware at 15.30; thereafter these, like so many coaches, become subsumed in the general entry for Hoddesdon, through which plied coaches for many towns. Hoddesdon, like Daventry and Towcester, was a coaching town.

There is another, distinct, route from Cambridge to London, through Great Chesterford, Hockerill, Harlow and Epping. The Cambridge *Fly* plied this road, leaving the Red Lion at Cambridge at 10.00. Along it also went the various coaches from north Norfolk. The *Hero* began in Fakenham in 1830, but the *Norfolk Hero* of 1839 began in Wells. This ran south on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays, leaving

the Hoop Inn in Cambridge at 14.15. On the other days, the *Regulator* from Holt left the same inn at the same hour. In 1830, this had been the *Norfolk Regulator*. They provided both a service to London and one to Cambridge. For such towns there was little point in by-passing Cambridge. For Norwich, there were seemingly few passengers who wished to go to Cambridge.

Cambridge was well served for coaches to other towns in East Anglia and the Midlands (Fig. 2). Not everything shown on the map is strictly contemporary: the *East Anglian* to Norwich has been mentioned as recorded only in 1845, and the coach to Upwell is recorded only in 1830, though one to Ely is found in 1839. The variety of routes from Cambridge to Birmingham illustrates this perfectly. In 1823, one is recorded leaving the George, Cambridge, on Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays at 06.00, but this may have been short-lived. At Huntingdon, a coach called the *Rising Sun* is noted as leaving the George at 08.00, and this coach may be found at Northampton at 13.45 and Daventry at 16.00. Best recorded in 1830, the *Rising Sun* left the Sun Inn, Cambridge at 06.00, the George at Huntingdon at 08.00, and reached Thrapston at 10.00, Wellingborough at 11.00 and was probably in Northampton about 13.00. There does then seem to have been a break for lunch, before resuming the journey at 14.00 for Daventry, Coventry and Birmingham. The return journey also left Northampton at 14.00 and as with modern country bus crews, the drivers may have changed coaches to enable them to get home the same night. The *Rising Sun* reached Wellingborough at 15.30, Thrapston at 17.00 and Huntingdon at 19.00. Cambridge would have been reached about 20.30 or 21.00. Timekeeping was quite good by coaching services, barring severe weather or accidents, so a regular arrival time, advertised by the Sun Inn but not recorded by the directories, would have been known. From 1839, the *Rising Sun* changed its route to go via Southam, Leamington, Warwick and Solihull after Daventry. The railway had come, but unlike the Birmingham to Great Yarmouth *Royal Mail*, the coach did not stop short of its ultimate destination: the quoted example in 1839 only went to Leicester. In 1839 also the *Rising Sun* had moved inns in Cambridge and now began at the Hoop Inn in Sidney Street. A different, alternate days service between Cambridge and Birmingham is also found in 1839. The *Eagle* left the Eagle Inn on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays at 07.30 for St Neots, Bedford, Turvey, Yardley Hastings, Northampton, Weedon, Daventry, Southam, Leamington, Warwick and Birmingham. Timed at 09.30 at St Neots and 10.45 at Bedford, this seems to have been a short-lived enterprise. It did not survive into the railway era. The *Rising Sun* on the other hand seems to have enjoyed a new lease of life in an attenuated form, for in 1850 it is recorded as the *Old Rising Sun* leaving the Hoop Inn at 07.15 for Huntingdon at 09.00 and going on to Thrapston. The return journey left Thrapston at 14.00 and Huntingdon at 16.00.

If the *Rising Sun* to Birmingham was able to live on into the railway age, beyond the demise of much of the coaching era, the various coaches from Cambridge to the East Midlands died fairly quickly once the railway came. These seem all to have been run by one company, William Ekin and Co. They had names of the various allied commanders at Waterloo. The only recorded coach in 1823 was the *Blucher* from the

King's Head in Cambridge at 13.00, and the George in Huntingdon at 10.00. There was a service between Cambridge and Leicester, called simply the *Leicester*. By 1830 this had become the *Wellington*, leaving the Sun and Blue Boar inns at 07.00, for a journey from Cambridge via Huntingdon, Stilton and Stamford each day, and thence via Uppingham on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays and via Oakham and Melton Mowbray on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays. This dual arrangement, though not named, still persisted in 1836. In 1839, the coach had been renamed the *Alexander* and ran daily from the Hoop Inn, Cambridge at 07.00. Its journey was now exclusively via Uppingham and the coach went on from Leicester to Nottingham. Part of the same enterprise was the *Blucher*, which was still a coach from Cambridge to Huntingdon in both 1830 and 1836, but in 1839 had become a coach to Stamford from the Hoop Inn, Cambridge on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays only, leaving at 10.00. It also boasted a branch coach to Peterborough. For a time in 1836, William Ekin and Co. also ran a coach from Cambridge to Northampton, but no details of this were recorded by any of the directories.

Local routes as well as more long-distance cross-country ones are shown on Fig. 2. One of these was the coach to Upwell of 1830, leaving the Sun Inn, Cambridge at 16.00 on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays. It went via Ely and Littleport. The inward journey, called the *Telegraph*, left Upwell for Cambridge on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays at 05.30. This was a short-lived enterprise, but in 1836 two separate coaches ran between Cambridge and Ely on Mondays, Wednesdays and Saturdays, and one is recorded in 1839, leaving at 18.00 on those days for Ely from the George in Cambridge.

This paper has already noted that the *East Anglian* from Cambridge to Norwich is not recorded before 1845. It seems very much like the *Victoria* from King's Lynn to Northampton, which in 1839 was described as "a coach to meet the trains". In contrast, a coach from Cambridge to Great Yarmouth via Bury St Edmunds seems to have been running for most of the coaching years. In 1830, the *Accommodation* left the General Coach Office on the Quay at Great Yarmouth at 06.40, reached Beccles at 08.30 and Bungay at 09.30; Harleston was reached at 11.00, Botesdale at 13.00 and Ixworth at 14.00. The *Accommodation* arrived at Bury St Edmunds at about 15.00 and then went on to Newmarket and Cambridge. The return journey was made on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, leaving Bury St Edmunds at 13.30. No times were recorded for Cambridge either in that year or in 1836 or 1839, but various towns record the destination as Cambridge rather than Bury St Edmunds. It was run by D. Hogarth, a Yarmouth man, who also organised coaches between Norwich and Yarmouth and provided one of the two coaches on the Birmingham to Yarmouth *Royal Mail* service.

Bury St Edmunds and Newmarket, as well as being on the Cambridge to Great Yarmouth route, had individual coaches to and from Cambridge. In 1830 coaches called the *Times* left Cambridge from the Sun Inn at 16.00 and another left the Blue Boar at 09.30 for Bury St Edmunds. In the same year, the *Times* left the Bell, Bury St Edmunds, at 11.00. In 1839, the timings of the *Times* were 15.00 from the Hoop Inn, Cambridge, and 10.45 from the Bell at Bury St Edmunds. Another coach left the Angel

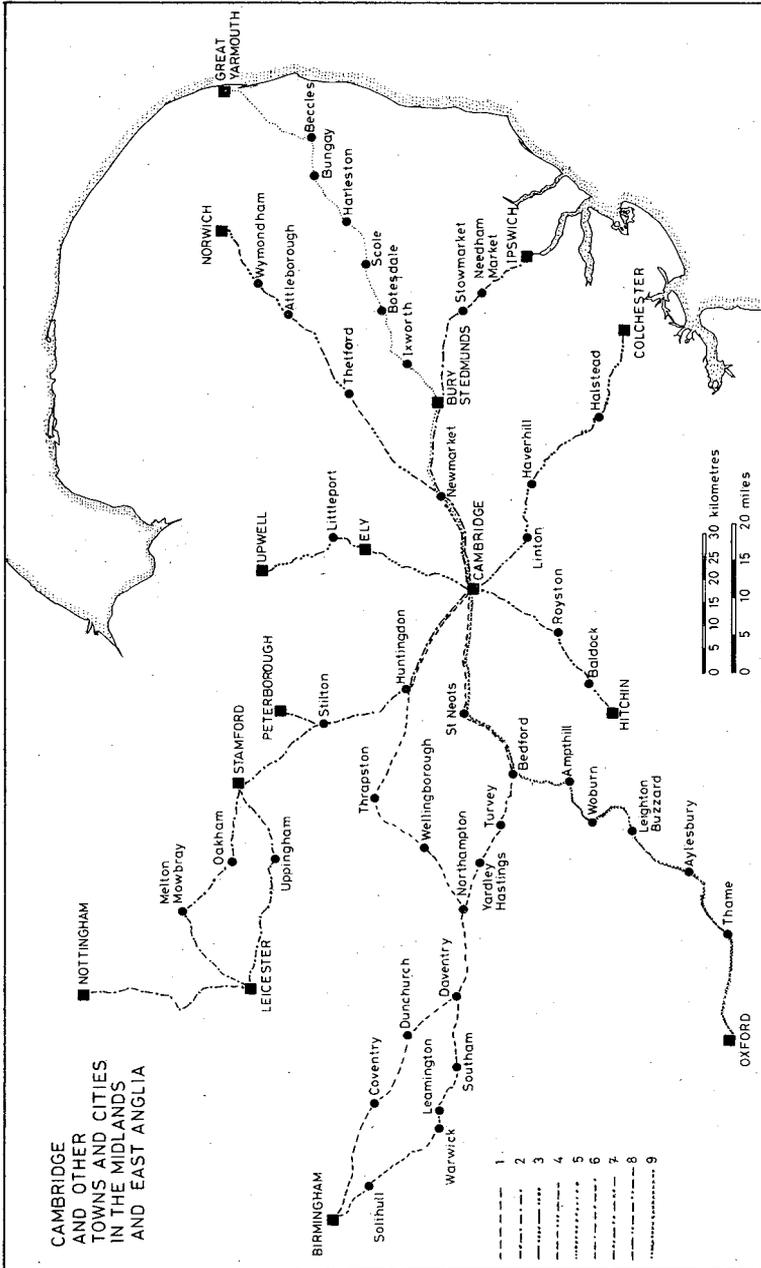


Fig. 2. Coaching routes from Cambridge to the Midlands and East Anglia. Key to routes: - 1. Cambridge - Birmingham 2. Cambridge - E. Midlands 3. Cambridge - Ely, Cambridge - Upwell 4. Cambridge - Norwich 5. Cambridge - Bury St. Edmunds and Gi. Yarmouth 6. Cambridge - Bury St. Edmunds and Ipswich 7. Cambridge - Colchester 8. Cambridge - Hitchin 9. Cambridge - Oxford

Inn, Bury St Edmunds, at 14.00 for Cambridge but this seems to have been the same as the coach which plied between Cambridge and Ipswich in that year. The *Accommodation* left the Hoop Inn, Cambridge, at 10.00 and a coach for Ipswich left the Angel, Bury St Edmunds at 14.00, on a journey via Stowmarket and Needham Market; the return journey left Ipswich at 10.00. This appears to have been fairly late in the period. No direct coach is recorded in 1836 or in 1830 between Cambridge and Ipswich, but in 1823 a coach called the *Comet* is found going from Cambridge to Ipswich and Colchester, via Linton, Haverhill and Hadleigh. The journey from Cambridge left at 09.00 on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays and that from Ipswich on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays at 09.30. Short-lived though this enterprise seems to have been, another coach from Cambridge to Colchester is found using the same Cambridge inn, the Red Lion, in 1830 and in 1839, leaving Cambridge on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays at 09.00 in 1830 and 09.30 in 1839. The route to Colchester from Cambridge remained the same: Linton, Haverhill and Halstead were the towns visited.

The *Wonder* coach from Cambridge to Hitchin is found only in 1839, leaving the Hoop Inn Cambridge at 15.00 on Mondays, Wednesdays and Saturdays in winter and an hour later in summer. Like the service to Ely, it was a purely local coach. The service to Oxford, however, was of longer distance and complex history. More than one enterprise tried its luck on this route. In 1839, a coach left the Eagle Inn, Cambridge, at 07.30 on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays for St Neots, Bedford, Ampthill, Woburn, Hockliffe, Leighton Buzzard, Aylesbury, Thame and Oxford. In view of the use of the same hostelry, the coach may have had some connection with the service to Birmingham via Bedford. The two together gave a daily service from Cambridge to Bedford. The same coach is found in 1830 and the *Lark* of 1823 on the same route used the same inn and is an obvious predecessor. It left at 05.00 on Mondays, but at 06.00 on other days. Briefly also in 1823, it had a rival. The *Rocket* had also gone south-west on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, returning on the alternate days, but the *Lark* then ran daily in both directions. Perhaps there was insufficient traffic for two coaches and ultimately the owners found only enough for a single journey each day.

The history of the Oxford to Cambridge service is difficult to reconstruct. The spectrum of coaches from the small towns of the Cambridge region to London is equally complex and changing (Fig. 3). The towns in a broad swathe between Bedford and Ipswich provide a fair cross-section of communities in rural England in the second quarter of the nineteenth century. They range from the suddenly thrusting, almost arrogant, Luton to the more placid Clare, from the solid virtues of Hitchin, built on a thriving corn trade, to the declining former cloth towns of Essex like Halstead and Hadleigh. Yet each town, however small, contrived to maintain its own coach to London. The metropolis was sufficiently close to be reached in a day and for the return journey to be made the same day. Some even managed two coaches to London.

Luton was one such town.¹¹ From 1828 onwards, the tenant of the Cock Inn, William Clarke, ran a daily coach to London, leaving at 06.00. This like the *Favourite* of 1839 ran via Harpenden, St Albans, South Mimms and Barnet to London, but the *Industry* Omnibus of Thomas Finch of 1836 and 1839 used a route via Wheathampstead,

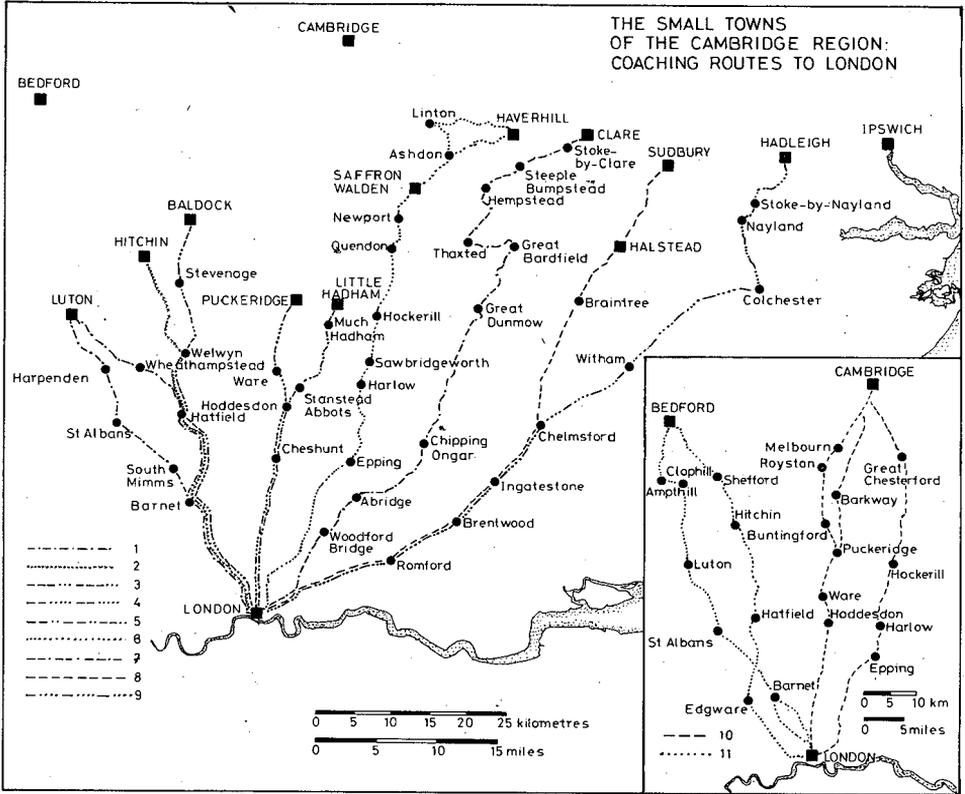


Fig. 3. The small towns of the Cambridge Region: coaching routes to London.

Inset: Routes between Cambridge and London, and Bedford and London.

- | | |
|--|----------------------------------|
| 1. Luton - London | 7. Clare - London |
| 2. Hitchin - London | 8. Sudbury and Halstead - London |
| 3. Baldock - London | 9. Hadleigh - London |
| 4. Puckeridge - London | 10. Cambridge - London |
| 5. Little Hadham - London | 11. Bedford - London |
| 6. Haverhill and Saffron Walden - London | |

Hatfield and Barnet to get to London. Because it was late in acquiring a railway, Luton retained its coaching services until well into the 1850s. Even just before the railway's opening in 1858, there was a service to Watford, for London, though this was cut back to St Albans in 1855.¹²

From Hitchin, there seems never to have been more than the one local enterprise, run by J.J. Kershaw of the Swan Inn.¹³ In 1823, it left at 08.00, but in 1828 it was timed to leave at 06.00 daily with additional journeys on Mondays, Wednesdays and Saturdays at 08.00. By 1836, the coach, now called *Kershaw's Safety Coach*, left at 06.00 on Mondays and Fridays and at 09.00 on other days. Each day the return journey began from the White Bear, Piccadilly, at 13.45 and the Three Cups, Aldersgate Street, at 14.30. The same timings are found in 1839 on the unvaried route via Welwyn, Hatfield and Barnet. Kershaw seems to have been an ambitious man. In 1823, coaches through Baldock are listed in detail, without a local one being noted, and in 1828 the directory writer wrote of coaches "to London from this place; and others pass through nearly every hour". A similar statement was made about Stevenage, but in 1839, *Kershaw's Coach* left the Rose and Crown Inn, Baldock at 05.30 on Mondays and Fridays and 08.30 on other days, and returned through Stevenage each day at 19.30. This spread of a coaching owner from one town to another is found elsewhere, for in 1836, A. Bryan of St Albans is also found running a coach from Luton quite separately from his St Albans to London coach.

Even quite small places could boast their own coach to London. The *Alert* left the Bell at Puckeridge at 06.30 on Mondays and Fridays in 1839 and at 07.00 on other days for a journey via Ware, Hoddesdon and Cheshunt to London. It returned through Ware at 18.45. In the same area, the *Times* left Little Hadham at 07.00, but not every day, for a journey through Stanstead Abbots, where it called at the Pied Bull at 08.00, and Hoddesdon, where the coach patronised the Bull Inn at 08.30. On the return journey the coach reached Hoddesdon at 18.00, Stanstead Abbots at 18.30 and presumably arrived at Little Hadham at about 19.30. A similar timetable was followed by *Guiver's Fly* from Roydon which called at the Pied Bull, Stanstead Abbots at 07.30 and the Bull, Hoddesdon, at 08.00. In 1836, Thomas Guiver had run a coach from Hoddesdon to London, but local needs were served by no fewer than three of the four coaches between Hertford and London.

The small towns of north-west Essex and the portions of Cambridgeshire and Suffolk just beyond also supported a vigorous coaching life. Haverhill had more than than one enterprise at various times, though their individual lives do not seem to have overlapped. In 1823, a coach leaving the Bell Inn at 07.00 on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays is noted; and in 1830, this coach has become the *Telegraph* via Saffron Walden and Bishop's Stortford, actually going into the town, rather than by-passing it through Hockerill. But in 1830 another coach from Haverhill is also noted. Under Linton, the directory writers record a *Royal Regulator* from Haverhill leaving the Crown Inn at 09.00 on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays for Ashdon, Saffron Walden, Newport, Quendon, Hockerill, Sawbridgeworth and London. The return journey called at the Crown, Haverhill at 21.00 on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays.

This dual provision seems to have been short-lived. In 1839, there is merely the *Telegraph* via Saffron Walden at 08.00 from the Bell at Haverhill. Saffron Walden also had its own coach: the *Walden* in 1839 left at 04.15 on Mondays and at 06.00 on other days. Earlier, in 1828, there had been a wider choice. The *Independent* left the Rose and Crown at 07.00 and returned from the Saracen's Head, Aldersgate at 19.30. It seems to have been a daily service. Other coaches ran alternate days. The *Defiance* left the Rose and Crown, Saffron Walden, on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays at 10.00 and a coach left the Sun Inn at 07.00 on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays. Both returned from London on the alternate days.

Both Clare and Hadleigh had their own coaches to London. In 1823, a coach left the Half Moon in Clare at 09.00 on Saturdays and at 11.00 on Tuesdays and Thursdays. By 1830, this had become the *Times* leaving at 08.00; it left an hour later in 1839, but appears in both years to have run each day except Sundays. The route did not vary, from Clare to Stoke-by-Clare and Steeple Bumpstead to Hempstead and on to Thaxted and Great Bardfield and thence by Great Dunmow, Chipping Ongar, Abridge and Woodford Bridge to London. The route of the Hadleigh coach did not vary either, through Stoke-by-Nayland and Nayland to Colchester and along the main route to London. In 1823, it left the George, Hadleigh at 06.00 on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays. By 1830 it had acquired a name, the *Wellington*, and in 1839 it is noted as running daily except Sundays.

Like many small towns on main through routes (in their case from Bury St Edmunds and Norwich) Halstead and Sudbury were well-served by coaches passing through. Yet both had their own coach. In 1830 Sudbury had two. The *Old Sudbury* left the Rose and Crown at 09.00 on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays: it became the *Sudbury* of 1839 leaving the same inn at 10.00. The rival in 1830, the *New Sudbury*, left the Swan Inn at 10.00 on Sundays and at 09.00 on Tuesdays and Thursdays. From Halstead in the same year there was the *Halstead* leaving the Royal Oak at 04.00 on Mondays and 06.00 on other weekdays. It went through Braintree at 07.00 on Tuesdays to Saturdays and 05.00 on Mondays. The *Sudbury* in 1839, passed through Halstead at 11.00 and Braintree at 12.00. After Chelmsford, like their fellows from Bury St Edmunds and Norwich, these coaches joined the busy road into London, along which plied coaches from Harwich, Great Yarmouth, Saxmundham, Wickham Market and Norwich.

The road to East Anglia via Romford, Brentwood, Ingatestone and Chelmsford was a busy one, but no less busy than that via Epping, Harlow, Hockerill, and Great Chesterford. From there this road branched: one section went on to Newmarket, Bury St Edmunds or Thetford, Attleborough, Wymondham and Norwich; the other went into Cambridge. Cambridge was also reached from London via Hoddesdon, Ware, Puckeridge, Buntingford, Royston and Melbourn.

Coaching was a gradually changing pattern: no route was constant, and the maps (Figs. 1 - 3) capture as a static picture an ever changing scene. A whole industry was built around coaching, and towns like Hoddesdon lived on the profits of their position on a through route. Future research could well be directed to the examination of that industry; an equally vital area of enquiry might also be its demise and the human

consequences. The routes delineated in the text and plotted on the maps provide only the beginnings of an enquiry into an aspect of early nineteenth-century England, which was short-lived, but caught the popular imagination. Beyond the imagination of Charles Dickens, and others, lies the hard core of reliable historical fact, noted by contemporaries, recorded in timetables, and which it is possible to place on maps.¹⁴ These maps and the text seek to place coaching routes in their proper historical context: the economic setting of early nineteenth-century England.¹⁵

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A paper such as this, based on printed sources, might be thought to have no particular thanks, yet it is fitting that I should record my thanks to those libraries who have co-operated with me in my search for information. It is therefore my great pleasure to thank the staff of the Department of History and Local Studies of Bedfordshire County Library, Bedford, and to record my especial thanks to Luton Museum's staff also, not least for the stimulating discussion provided by Mrs M. Nicholls, Mrs. C. Heck and Mr. R.K. Hagen.

NOTE ON THE SOURCES

Most of the information given in this paper has been assembled from various early nineteenth-century directories, and also the modern compilation of Alan Bates for 1836. These have not been listed individually in the footnotes, so as to save space. As a guide to further study, and incidentally providing also a record of printed sources for early Victorian Cambridge and its region, they have been given here in order of publication date.

1822-23 Pigot & Co., *London and Provincial New Commercial Directory for 1822-23*, (1822), for Norfolk, Lincolnshire and Leicester.

1823-24 Pigot & Co., *London and Provincial New Commercial Directory for 1823-24*, for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Essex, Hertfordshire, Huntingdonshire, and Suffolk

1828-29 Pigot & Co., *London and Provincial Commercial Directory and Topography for 1828-9* (1828), for Essex and Hertfordshire.

1830 Pigot & Co., *London and Provincial Commercial Directory and Topography for 1830*, (1830), for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Huntingdonshire, Norfolk, Northamptonshire and Suffolk.

- 1836 A. Bates, *Directory of Stage Coach Services, 1836* (Newton Abbot, 1969)
- 1839 Pigot & Co., *Royal National and Commercial Directory and Topography*, (1839), for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Essex, Hertfordshire, Huntingdonshire, Norfolk and Suffolk.
- 1844 W.White, *History, Gazetteer and Directory of Suffolk . . . , 1844*, (Newton Abbot, 1969 reprint as *White's 1844 Suffolk*).
- 1845 W.White, *History, Gazetteer and Directory of Norfolk . . . , 1845* (Newton Abbot, 1969, reprint as *White's 1845 Norfolk*).
- 1850 Slater's (late Pigot & Co.), *Royal National and Commercial Directory and Topography for 1850* (1850), for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Huntingdonshire, Lincolnshire, Norfolk, Northamptonshire, Rutland and Suffolk.

NOTES

1. D.H. Kennett, 'The Geography of Coaching in Early Nineteenth-Century Northamptonshire', *Northants. Past & Present* 5 (1974), 107-120.
2. D.H. Kennett, 'The Pattern of Coaching in Early Nineteenth-Century Norfolk', *Norfolk Arch.* forthcoming.
3. W. Albert, *The Turnpike Road System in England, 1663-1840*, (Cambridge, 1972), *passim*, is valuable for the roads of Cambridge and its region.
4. F.A. Reeve, *Victorian and Edwardian Cambridge from old photographs*, (London, 1971), has illustrations of many of the coaching inns of Cambridge mentioned in this paper, and gives details of their demolition dates.
5. Bedfordshire County Record Office, Rawlins papers, account book of the Bedford Coach, 1803-1808; document X 37/4.
6. Details compiled from Pigot, 1839, and Bates for 1836; the details for Kershaw are similarly derived.
7. Beds. C.R.O. document BS 1945.
8. Beds. C.R.O. Rawlins papers, documents catalogued as X 37, *passim*; for details see D.H. Kennett, 'The Kettering Coach, 1808-1815', forthcoming.
9. S. Hill to J. Rawlins, 6 April 1814; Rawlins papers, Beds. C.R.O. document X 37/9/5.
10. These are mapped Kennett, 1974, fig 3.
11. W. Austin, *A History of Luton and Its Hamlets*, (Newport, 1928), ii, 122; further details of the coaching history of Luton are given *ibid.* 93, 109 and 139.
12. The remoteness of Luton may be gauged by a sale catalogue of 1857, when to arrive by 12.00 it was necessary to leave Euston at 07.30 for a train to Leighton Buzzard,

change for a train to Dunstable and then take a horse omnibus; Luton Museum, sale catalogue A/5/5/40.

13. R.L. Hine, *History of Hitchin*

14 The reader who requires a general introduction to coaching is best directed first to R.C. and J.M. Anderson, *Quicksilver*, (Newton Abbot, 1973); S. Margetson, *Journey By Stages* (London, 1967); and R. Copeland, *Roads and Their Traffic, 1750-1850*, (Newton Abbot, 1968). Older works requiring much caution in their use are W. Outram Tristram, *Coaching Days and Coaching Ways*, (London, 1893, reprinted Wakefield, 1973), and G.C. Harper, *Stage Coach and Mail in Days of Yore*, (1903). In addition to the works of Kennett, recent county surveys are C. Noall, *A History of Cornish Mail and Stage Coaches*, (Truro, 1963); S.A.H. Burne, 'The Coaching Age in Staffordshire', *Trans. North Staffs. Field Club* 56 (1921-22), 49-74; and K.M. Spencer, 'Railways and Turnpikes in Preston, 1830-1850', *Transport History* 7 (1974), 124-133. The two last employ a rather different approach to that used here.

15. Paper completed 19 May 1975.

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