

Source 8a.

Extract from a book written by Esther Meynell

Esther Meynell was a young girl living in Sussex at the beginning of the 20th century. She later wrote a book called "A Woman Talking" and in this extract describes what it was like to see the Royal Mail galloping past her house.

The greatest thrill to be got from speed was the sight of the Royal Mail, with V.R. on its scarlet sides, galloping past on its journey from Brighton to London. It went by our gate, and though at an hour much too late for us to be out of bed, occasionally, on summer nights we were promised the treat of seeing it go by, and wrapped up and fetched out of bed to watch for it over the garden hedge.

I still remember the shiver of delight with which I would hear the beat of the hooves of the four horses, the jingle and rattle of the harness coming along the silent road, and then the glare of the great yellow lamps appearing round the curve, throwing visible beams around them, golden yellow, reflected on the glossy red paint, the glass door all crossed with a lattice-work of bars, behind which a uniformed figure could be seen frantically sorting Her Majesty's mails. Did he do this all the way to London, we sleepily wondered, as the sound of the galloping horses faded away into the quiet, untroubled night, and we returned to our beds.

The speed of these mail coaches was both a necessity and a pride, and to maintain it the horses were changed four times during the journey – which meant sixteen horses. I believe the first change was at the Plough Inn at Pyecombe. Twelve miles an hour was maintained all the way to London – what a trifling speed that seems to the modern mind, yet the effect of speed attained by these four galloping horses and the rattling, swaying Mail Coach, was far more exciting than anything produced by the internal combustion engine. And the guard had a horn, a fifty-two-inch metal rod through which he blew....and he was armed with a sword and a blunderbuss.

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