READING MUSEUM SERVICE

Hands On Learning
with Reading Museum Service

ROAD TRANSPORT H46
COACHING

On Thursday, 27th April 1727, *The Daily Post* published the following advertisment :

NEWBERRY FLYING STAGE COACH IN ONE DAY
Sets out from the White Horse Inn

in Fleet Street, at 4 o'clock in the morning, to the Bear Inn in Maidenhead to dine, every Monday, Wednesday and Friday, from thence to the White Heart Inn in Newberry, and returns from thence Tuesday, Thursdays and Saturdays. Each passenger to carry fourteen pounds weight and to pay Nine Shillings a-piece full pay, and to all other places on that route at proportionable rates.

Performed, if God permit, by John Baker, Edward Gregory and James Hall.
N.B. The coach carries only four passengers.

This coach would have passed through Reading on its way from London to Newbury (a distance of 62 miles) - one of hundreds of such vehicles travelling along the roads of Berkshire and elsewhere in the early eighteenth century. Passenger carrying vehicles were rare before the seventeenth century, before that you walked, climbed aboard a cart, rode a horse or used a sedan chair. The use of passenger carrying vehicles gradually increased, but they did not become common until the latter half of the eighteenth century. The Regency period marked the beginning of the great age of coaching. From around 1810 to the 1830s coaches ruled the newly sealed roads and reached fantastic speeds of around 12 miles per hour allowing a free and easy flow of traffic, passengers and goods around the country. It seems rather sad that a complex transport system should take hundreds of years to develop only to take off for a few decades and then die overnight with the arrival of the train.

The coming of the railways changed the lives of everyone in Britain. By 1852 all the main rail routes in Britain had been built. Passengers and goods could now be taken quickly and easily to all parts of the country. Horse drawn vehicles remained in widespread use throughout the nineteenth century, even within cities, and they may have continued to be important had it not been for the invention of the motorcar. With the coming of the car the social relationships, economy and environment of Britain were even more dramatically changed than they had been with the construction of the railway system.

This box contains artefacts associated with the horse powered transport system which reached its height in the first few decades of the nineteenth century.

Reading BOROUGH COUNCIL
Heritage Lottery Fund

Copy of a Post Horn



In the early nineteenth century there were private coaches and mail coaches. The Royal Mail was run by the state and its main purpose was to carry letters and parcels, although some paying passengers were carried. In the 1780s and 1790s only four passengers were allowed inside. Later, one outside passenger was allowed by the coachman, and later still a double seat was put on top. Finally, people were allowed at the hind end by the guard, but only on two day journeys.

The Mail was best for sending parcels because of its reliability and the fact that the coach wasn't laden with passengers and baggage and so would be able to carry them - fresh fish and game could easily be sent. It was the guard's responsibility to get the mail through - if the coach became stuck then they could take the horses and ride on. If they couldn't ride they were expected to take the mail to the next stage on foot.

The Post Office supplied the guard with his firearms, (a blunderbuss and two horse pistols with ammunition) a timepiece and a horn. The horn seems to have been used by coach guards for a number of different purposes. All traffic including soldiers on the march and farmers driving a slow hay cart, or herding cattle, had to give way to the Mail coach as it blasted its horn. Horns were also sounded to warn toll-keepers of the approach of the carriage. At this date most of the road system was repaired by the parish through which the road ran and the parish was allowed to exact a toll on users. Gates, with a small house for the keeper, constantly interrupted the movement of carriages. A blaring horn was a useful way of warning snoozing toll-keepers to wake up. Finally, the horn could be used when arriving at an inn to warn staff that hungry and thirsty new customers would soon be entering or, when the coach was due to leave, to warn passengers to get back in quickly. There are quite a few stories of passengers having to run after the coach which had set off without them!

Hands On Learning
with Reading Museum Service

ROAD TRANSPORT H46
COACHING

Foot Warmer



Travelling by horse carriage could be an arduous business. The journeys were often lengthy. In 1700 York was a week distant from London. The journey between London and Edinburgh, even as late as 1763, took a fortnight. Passengers often appointed a chairman at the beginning of the journey - partly to sort out disputes between the cramped passengers and also, sometimes, with the driver. In 1760, an action was brought before the Court of the King's Bench to recover damages after a stage-coach driver tried to compel his passengers to dine at some low inn on the road. They preferred to walk to a respectable inn at some little distance, and desired the driver to call for them, as he must pass the place. Instead, he drove past the inn at full speed, leaving them to get up to London as best they could. The jury awarded the passengers 20 pounds damages.

During the nineteenth century hot water bottles of all kinds were often made from stoneware or copper. Given that the journey was likely to be long, cramped, quarrelsome and frequently cold, a device like this, which promised a trace of personal comfort, would come in very useful! The label on this very neat example gives the maker and place of origin 'James Bramah, 39 Surrey Street, Sheffield'. Bramah is a Yorkshire surname. White's *Directory of Sheffield* (1852) lists a Henry Bramah, of 77 Hargate, as a tinner, brazier, and coppersmith - perhaps this was a relative?

Carriage Lamp



Coaches and carriages didn't stop running when it got dark. They often began their journeys very early in the morning and, during the winter, continued long after dusk. Coaches carried lamps to illuminate their way and also as warning lights on the rear. This example is one of the latter kind. It was illuminated by a candle but, unfortunately, this example has lost half of its candle holder. The tube at the bottom would originally have been another 12-15cm long. It could be unscrewed and a candle fitted onto a spring-loaded platform inside. As the candle burned down the spring mechanism pushed the remainder of the stub upwards. The lamp would have fitted onto a bracket on the side of the coach using the flange next to the hinge of the glass door.

Hands On Learning
with Reading Museum Service

ROAD TRANSPORT
COACHING

H46

Halter Weights



A halter weight (also called a manger ball) was a wooden weight which was used when tying a horse to its stall in the stable. A rope from the harness would run through a ring on the manger and this weight was tied to the end to stop the rope being pulled back through the manger ring.

Halter weights are quite heavy - this one weighs 800g and this helped keep the rope slightly taut and prevented it from getting tangled. At the height of the coaching era thousands of horses were required and inns needed to have extensive stables. Often an inn-keeper owned a chain of premises. Stage lengths were from 5 to 15 miles depending on the type of country and at each stop the tired horses would be changed, which was often accomplished in one to two minutes. If the inn was part of a chain the horses would remain where they were to be fed, watered and rested. If not, they would have to be hacked back to their owner's inn by a stable boy.

In the late eighteenth century Mrs Mountain of the Saracen's Head Inn, Holborn, kept some 2,000 horses in her stables for the routes she served. It is estimated that the life of a coach horse was only three years. The strain of pulling a coach weighing more than two ton for an average of 10 miles at a speed of some 12 miles per hour two days out of three soon exhausted the animals. After that they were sold for they still had significant working life left. Farm work seemed easy by comparison.

Hands On Learning
with Reading Museum Service

READING MUSEUM SERVICE

ROAD TRANSPORT
COACHING

H46

Horse Bit



Whether a horse is part of a coach team or is to be ridden by an individual it will have to be fitted with a bridle if it is to be controlled. A bridle is an arrangement of straps around the horse's head. A bit is a piece of metal, attached to the bridle, which fits in the natural space between the horse's front cutting teeth and its back grinding teeth. Reins are attached to the outer ends of the bit and are held in the rider's or driver's hands. Reins are the means by which a horse rider or driver gives directional commands to the horse's head. Pulling on the reins can be used to steer or stop the horse. The sides of a horse's mouth are sensitive, so pulling on the reins pulls the bit, which then pulls the horse's head from side to side, which is how the horse is controlled. There are several different kinds of bit and if they are not fitted correctly they can damage the horse. The bit in this box is large and may well have been used to control a cart horse, but it gives some idea of the way coach horses would have been controlled.

Schooling Spurs



Nowadays spiked spurs like this are no longer used, as they are considered cruel, but for centuries spurs were considered a normal part of a rider's outfit. This pair would have been fastened over a boot using a leather strap. One end would be fastened onto the catch while the other would have been tightened using the buckle on the other side. Fastening them on prevented them being lost if they worked loose. This pair were supposedly used for schooling (training) a young horse and are therefore, at least in theory, less sharp than an ordinary set of spurs. Be careful, though, as they can still give a sharp prick!