

The Carrier's cart was then much in evidence, and its periodical visits were looked forward to with even greater interest than the postman's gig. It took varied forms. Sometimes an ordinary one-horse cart provided with ample tarpaulin; but more frequently a huge two-wheeled affair roofed over with canvas in which the carrier could sleep comfortably. These were used for the transport of goods and parcels all over the Kingdom. One wonders how the products of the great manufacturing centres could be conveyed to distant destinations in this primitive manner, but they were. The carrier's trade was a large industry and had wide ramifications, and the carrier himself was an important character all along the line of his route: a change of horses awaited him, too, at his successive stages.

It was one of the most interesting sights in Edinburgh, especially for us youngsters, to see the mail coaches leaving the post office at 4 p.m. There might be a dozen of them assembled at that hour ready to set out for all parts of the Kingdom. They were even more elaborately painted than the stage coach, and each one had the Royal Arms emblazoned on the panels. The horses were of a higher type too, being mostly blooded animals. What with the tooting of horns and general hurry-scurry, such a street scene has no counterpart in these days and can never be forgotten by any who have witnessed it. The Royal Mail Coach System was established by the Post Office Department in 1784. Hitherto letters were sent by ordinary public conveyance, the frequency, however, of robberies by highwaymen, and the rifling of mail bags for money, suggested the remedy introduced into Parliament by Lord Palmerston, the success of which was so great that his lordship was rewarded with a gift of £50,000 and a life pension of £3000 a year. The mail coaches were then put in charge of armed guards and other important improvements introduced into the postal service.

The distance from Edinburgh to London was from 420 to 450 miles, according to route, and was covered by mail coach in 46 to 48 hours. It had similar accommodation for passengers as in the ordinary stage coach with this difference that the rear seat was occupied exclusively by the guard who had a brace of loaded pistols