

John Hanforth and Manchester's first stage-coaches

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John Hanforth founded Manchester's first stage-coach service in 1760 and was a key figure in stage-coaching for nearly 20 years. As a person he remains elusive, but a great deal can be discovered about his business and its impact on stage-coaching.

By 1760, long-distance stage-coach services were already a century old. The first appears to have been that between London and York in 1653, quickly joined by linked services between London and Wakefield (recorded only in 1658 and 1695-1723), London, Lincoln and Barton-upon-Humber (for Hull), and York, Newcastle and Edinburgh. The Chester service began in 1657. Between 1658 and 1760, the only addition to the services linking London and the north was the Warrington coach, started in 1703.¹ Many of the earliest coachmasters were London hackney coachmen, including two of the three proprietors of the Chester service (the third was a London coachmaker). By the 1680s, carriers were prominent in the trade, based at the provincial destination rather than London, but by the 1720s innkeepers based at places en route, rather than at either terminus, were beginning to dominate coaching.² Hanforth fell into none of these categories.

The first reference to Hanforth (almost certainly the later coachmaster) is an announcement of March 1752 that John Hanforth at the Swan with Two Necks, Market Street Lane, Manchester, had a coach and six horses for hire, and continued to keep two 'street-coaches' (presumably hackney coaches) in Manchester.³ In 1758, Hanforth the later coachmaster was said to have frequented the Swan with Two Necks, Lad Lane, London,

¹ Dorian Gerhold, *Carriers and coachmasters: trade and travel before the turnpikes* (Chichester, 2005), pp. 84-85, 197-201. A Doncaster service is recorded only in 1695, *ibid.*, p. 200.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 86-87, 105, 109-11.

³ *Orion Adams's Weekly Journal; or the Manchester Advertiser*, 3 Mar. 1752.

for the previous ten years, and for the previous two years to have been a common carrier between Manchester and London.⁴

It was in 1758 that John Swaine, innkeeper at that inn, decided to retire. A few years earlier the inn had been described as having upwards of 40 beds and stabling for 100 horses.⁵ Swaine agreed to sell Hanforth his lease of the inn (renewed in 1757 for 31 years) for £1,000. This was evidently far beyond Hanforth's resources, but Swaine was willing to accept £200 and subsequently £80 a year until the whole sum was paid. Swaine later complained that the £80 a year was hard to obtain, but since only £349 remained outstanding in 1765 (including interest), Hanforth must have been reasonably diligent in paying it. He was thus able to obtain a major London carrying inn for a fairly small down payment, and was even able to rebuild much of it following a fire in late 1759 or early 1760.⁶ It was as a London innkeeper that he entered the coaching trade.

In 1760, with three partners, Hanforth began the first ever coach services to Manchester and to Leeds, beginning on 3 March and 21 April respectively and each running from London twice a week.⁷ They filled the main gaps in the coaching map of England. (A Manchester to Liverpool coach was established in the same year.⁸) The new Manchester-London service, advertised from January onwards, seems to have prompted the owners of the existing Warrington coach (via Lichfield, Stone and Holmes Chapel) to extend it to Manchester, so there was briefly competition. But in 1761, the Warrington coach's proprietors, none of whom lived further north than Lichfield, advertised it as a Liverpool and Warrington coach, and it is not recorded again as a Manchester service.⁹ Indeed, there seems to have been no

⁴ National Archives, E 112/1596, no. 734.

⁵ *Adams's Weekly Courant*, 5 Jan. 1747.

⁶ National Archives, E 112/1596, no. 734.

⁷ National Archives, E 134/8 George III Easter 10.

⁸ *Manchester Mercury*, 2 Sept. 1760.

⁹ *Manchester Mercury*, 20 Mar. 1759, 18 Mar. 1760; *London Evening-Post*, 12 May 1761. The three proprietors were Anthony Jackson, a Lichfield innkeeper, Thomas Whaley, a London innkeeper, and Henry Secret, who horsed Jackson's Lichfield coach between Daventry and London, *ibid.*; National Archives, C 11/2086/35; *Aris's Birmingham Gazette*, 23 Apr. 1744, 30 Mar. 1752.

Manchester-London coach except Hanforth's until a service by 'diligence' (probably short-lived) was begun in 1776-77 and then mail coaches in 1785.¹⁰ Hanforth's coaches also appear to have been unchallenged at Leeds.¹¹

In the 1660s Chester had been about 50% larger than Manchester (including Salford), and York about twice the size of Leeds, but by the 1770s, when reasonably reliable population figures are again available, the relationships had changed: Manchester's population grew from about 5,000 in the 1660s to 27,000 in 1773, when it was about double Chester's, and Leeds's population grew from perhaps 5,000 in the 1660s to 30,000 in 1775, at least twice as much as York's.¹² A second change was improved roads to Manchester and Leeds, especially the latter, which seems to have been inaccessible to wheeled vehicles in the early eighteenth century. A campaign to improve the roads around Leeds began in the early 1740s, and by 1750 an almost continuously turnpiked road linked Leeds and London. Manchester was similarly linked to London by 1750.¹³ Improved roads were starting to be reflected in stage-coaches' winter journey times in the 1750s, though summer journey times did not usually fall until the early 1760s.¹⁴ The third element was someone to spot the opportunity opened up and take it.

The earliest stage-coaches were heavily patronised by the gentry, and the same was probably true of Hanforth's coaches.

¹⁰ No others have been found in the years searched in *Manchester Mercury* and *Derby Mercury*, or in Elizabeth Raffald, *The Manchester directory for the year 1772* (1889); Lewis's *directory of the towns of Manchester and Salford...1788* (1888). For the diligence, *Derby Mercury*, 29 Nov. 1776; *Manchester Mercury*, 8 Apr. 1777.

¹¹ No other service is mentioned in *Leeds Mercury* from Sept. 1776 to June 1777 inclusive.

¹² Tom Arkell, 'Identifying regional variations from the hearth tax', *The Local Historian*, 33 (2003), pp. 162, 169; Jan de Vries, *European urbanization 1500-1800* (London, 1984), pp. 270-71; P. J. Corfield, *The impact of English towns 1700-1800* (Oxford, 1982), pp. 111-12, 183; A. D. M. Phillips and C. B. Phillips, *A new historical atlas of Cheshire* (Chester, 2002), p. 42.

¹³ R. G. Wilson, 'Transport dues as indices of economic growth, 1775-1820', *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser. 19 (1966), pp. 111-12; William Albert, *The turnpike road system in England 1663-1840* (Cambridge, 1972), pp. 32, 35.

¹⁴ Gerhold, *Carriers and coachmasters*, pp. 156-58.

But his coaches are also likely to have been used by merchants and industrialists. The Manchester area's textile output was largely consigned to London, which still dominated the cotton product market at the end of the eighteenth century and had then only recently been replaced by Liverpool as the main port of entry for raw cotton. Banking services were also centred upon London.¹⁵ Contact with Londoners was therefore vital for Manchester's businessmen, and they would have benefited from occasional face-to-face meetings. Previously, Manchester people would have used the Chester or Warrington stage-coaches or ridden on horseback, taking about four days in each case (six days by coach in winter); the journey could be done by post-horse in three days, but at greater cost.¹⁶ Hanforth's Manchester coaches, taking three days, were relatively fast, and were more convenient than coaches starting elsewhere or riding on horseback (especially in bad weather). The even faster option of post-chaises was available by 1760 but was much more expensive than stage-coaches.¹⁷

According to the partners' agreement, Hanforth was to horse the Manchester and Leeds coaches from London to Newport Pagnell (from October 1760, he took the Leeds coach as far as Northampton); Matthew How the younger, innkeeper at the George, Derby, was to horse the Leeds coach on to Loughborough and the Manchester one to Leicester; Samuel Glanville, innkeeper at the Angel, Sheffield, was to horse the Leeds coach on to Sheffield and the Manchester one to Ashbourne; and William Richardson of Wakefield, coachmaker, was to complete the journeys (see Figure 1 opposite). Each was to provide at his own cost the horses, coaches and drivers needed in his own 'district', whereas the cost of tolls, taxes, advertisements and bookkeeping was to be divided equally between them, as were the receipts. This was a long-established form of organisation in stage-coaching.¹⁸ The Manchester journey was to take three days and the Leeds one four days.¹⁹

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 91; Gerard L. Turnbull, *Traffic and transport: an economic history of Pickfords* (London, 1979), p. 24.

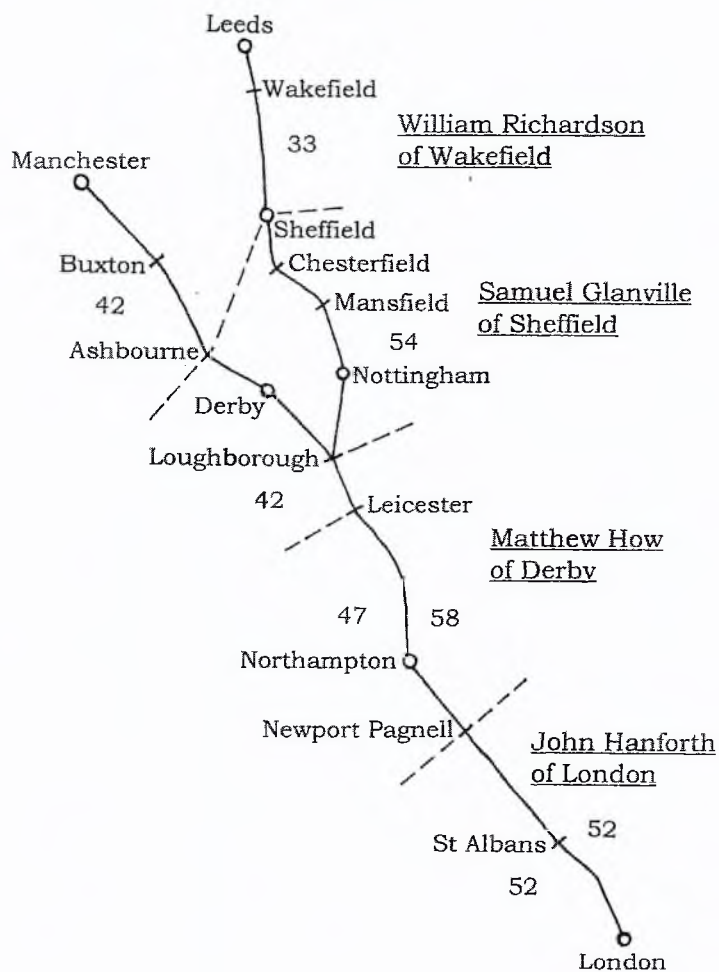
¹⁶ Gerhold, *Carriers and coachmasters*, p. 97.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 151-52, 164.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 119.

¹⁹ National Archives, C 12/2042/6.

Figure 1



Hanforth kept 20 or 21 horses for each coach (26 for the Leeds one when he operated it to Northampton), and three coaches. Apparently, this was beyond his resources, as he claimed to have agreed that Edward Thorne, a London upholsterer, would have half his share, providing half the capital as well as taking on 'a great part of the fatigue and trouble'. Thorne's alleged failure to fulfil his commitment gave rise to proceedings in the courts of chancery and exchequer and the recording of much information about the two services. According to William Smith, who 'had the inspection and overlooking' of the coaches from London, the 42 horses were worth about £20 each when bought; a good coach cost about £100, lasted about three years, and declined in value to about £40 after one year; hay and corn cost 2s 6d per horse per day; keeping the coaches and harness in repair cost about £210 per year; coachmen were paid 15s per week, horsekeepers (of whom three were needed for each of the services) 10s per week and postilions only 3s per week; and turnpikes to Newport Pagnell and back cost 29s per week for each service.²⁰ Putting the information together, provender accounted for 62% of costs, depreciation of horses for 7%, horsekeepers for 5%, coachmen and postilions for 11%, coaches and harness for 10% and tolls for 5%; in total, the horses accounted for 74% of costs.

The Manchester coach at first made quicker journeys than the Leeds one, covering 61 miles per day in summer compared with 49, helped by starting two hours earlier at 4 a.m. The Leeds schedule in summer initially consisted of four days of markedly unequal length – 67, 59, 39 and 33 miles, the longest days being those nearest London. However, by 1761 this had been cut to three days by combining the last two days into one, with a starting time of 3 a.m. instead of 6 a.m. on that day and covering 72 miles. Distances of 59 to 72 miles per day were then typical of flying coaches using three teams per day instead of two. Much less typical, but becoming less unusual in the 1750s, was that the Manchester coach had the same schedule – three days – in winter

²⁰ National Archives, E 134/8, George III Easter 10. See also National Archives, C 12/2042/6, E 126/29, Trinity 1764, no. 19, E 133/63/23, E 112/1569, no. 41. The figure for depreciation of horses in the next sentence has been estimated.

as in summer.²¹

In the early 1760s, stage-coach speeds began at last to increase from those established in the 1650s, and Hanforth was among the leaders in this. The immediate cause was more durable steel springs, which depended both on technical innovation in spring-making and on better roads (since steel springs broke easily on bad roads). They reduced the draught required, making possible greater speed without increased cost. They began to be used on lighter stage-coaches in 1752, but apparently could not be used on the heavier coaches carrying six inside passengers until 1764.²² The Leeds coaches used steel springs from the start, and so they probably at first carried only four inside passengers. The same was probably true of the Manchester ones, though these were at first described simply as 'flying machines' without any mention of steel springs. Hanforth may in any case have increased the miles per hour more than steel springs alone permitted, since this would have required more horses, and the stated number of horses kept by Hanforth in 1760-61 was high – 1.2 horses per double mile,²³ compared with a more usual 0.4 to 0.8.²⁴ Fares were correspondingly high at £2 5s for each service – 3.0d per mile to Manchester and 2.7d per mile to Leeds, compared with a more normal 2.5d per mile.²⁵ Hanforth was clearly determined to run his coaches as fast as possible. From 4 August 1760 until at least 19 August, the Manchester coach was advertised as taking only two days – a remarkable 94 miles per day – without an increase in price. There is no evidence that this high-summer schedule was repeated in the next few years, but from April 1765 the journey was cut to two days throughout the summer season, at an increased fare of 3.3d per mile. The winter schedule remained three days.²⁶

²¹ *Manchester Mercury*, 29 July 1760; *The Public Advertiser* [Sheffield], 21 Oct. 1760, 11 May 1762; *Leeds Intelligencer*, 19 May 1761; Gerhold, *Carriers and coachmasters*, pp. 143, 156-58; *Manchester Mercury*, 26 Aug. 1760, 27 Oct. 1761.

²² Gerhold, *Carriers and coachmasters*, pp. 158-59, 162, 164.

²³ That is, the number required if the service had been daily each way.

²⁴ Gerhold, *Carriers and coachmasters*, p. 116.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 161.

²⁶ *Manchester Mercury*, 29 July, 19 & 26 Aug. 1760, 29 Oct. 1761, 26 Mar.,

From 1761, Hanforth expanded his range of coach services, always with partners along the roads concerned. The first additions were to Portsmouth and Chester in March 1761. The latter was described as 'A new flying machine, on steel springs', carrying four passengers. Whereas Chester coaches had taken four days in summer ever since 1657, this was now cut to two days. Hanforth and his partners were newcomers on this route and seem to have prompted the existing Chester coachmasters to provide a similar service, taking the same two days. Winter journeys, previously six days, were reduced to three days.²⁷ Other services were added: Dover and Shrewsbury by 1764, Stamford by 1765, Bristol in 1765, Bedford by 1766. In the Dover case, Hanforth had the nerve to request support 'in preference to new opposers'.²⁸ Extending his interests in this way may have caused Hanforth to part with some or all of his share in the Manchester coach to Samuel Tennant, but it was back in Hanforth's hands in 1772.²⁹

Hanforth was the first London coachmaster to take shares in a number of coaches on different roads and retain them for any length of time. The only earlier examples are John Booth, innkeeper at the Saracens Head, Friday Street, in the 1680s (Bristol, Exeter and Taunton, but the latter two only briefly) and Thomas Smith, a London coachmaker, in the mid-1730s (Chester, Lichfield, Shrewsbury, Northampton and Daventry, but all except the Daventry coach following the same route as far as Northampton and all sold in 1736.³⁰) In fact, Hanforth seems not to have been involved in the Bristol, Stamford, Bedford and

15 Oct. 1765; *Derby Mercury*, 5 Apr. 1765.

²⁷ *Adams's Weekly Courant*, 17 and 31 Mar., 3 Nov. 1761; Gerhold, *Carriers and coachmasters*, pp. 208, 216.

²⁸ *Kentish Post*, 29 Sept. 1764; *Aris's Birmingham Gazette*, 20 Aug. 1764; *Stamford Mercury*, 4 Apr. 1765; *Felix Farley's Bristol Journal*, 19 Jan. 1765; *Northampton Mercury*, 27 Oct. 1766; *Kentish Post*, 23 Mar. 1765.

²⁹ Tennant is listed instead of Hanforth in 1765 (e.g. *Derby Mercury*, 5 Apr. 1765) and in Raffald, *Manchester directory* in 1772, but Hanforth in advertisements of 1772 and 1776-77. H. S. Twells, 'Derby's flying machines and earliest coaches', *Journal of the Derbyshire Archaeological and Natural History Society*, new ser. 17 (1943), pp. 70-71; *Derby Mercury*, 8 Nov. 1776, 30 Jan. 1777.

³⁰ Gerhold, *Carriers and coachmasters*, pp. 105, 111.

Dover coaches for long, but his Manchester, Leeds, Chester and Shrewsbury coaches certainly continued. These followed just two routes out of London (the first two to Loughborough, the latter two to Coventry), which suggests that operating several coaches was still most advantageous when they followed the same route, probably because of the difficulty of supervision and the desirability of keeping stocks of provender only at a few places. The later pattern of having shares in coaches on numerous diverging roads depended on individual coachmasters operating shorter lengths of route than in Hanforth's time, but Hanforth's network showed how coaching would develop. In the mid 1760s the only other London innkeepers with services on more than one road were Peter Sheldon at the Bull, Bishopsgate (Ipswich and York) and William Dimock at the George and Blue Boar, Holborn (York and Newcastle and Exeter).³¹ In 1791, of 21 London innkeepers with seven or more separate coaches using their inns, seven were themselves involved in all or most of those coaches.³² In the entire history of stage-coaching, there were probably only several dozen such men, of whom only a few from stage-coaching's last years (W. Chaplin, W. Horne and E. Sherman) have attracted much attention. Hanforth was the pioneer.

In 1773 or 1774 Hanforth established a direct coach to Liverpool (apparently replacing an existing service), in partnership with William Dimock of London and others at Dunstable, Colehill, Lichfield, Stone, Middlewich and Warrington. Hanforth stated that he 'from his situation in London and considerable connections in the like way of trade and business became the principal acting partner therein'. He claimed the coach had not been 'a very gaining one' and had made only small profits, and it continued only until summer 1776.³³ By 1776, journey times had been reduced for some of Hanforth's coaches: Manchester in winter from three days (as in 1772) to two, Leeds in winter to two and a half days and Leeds in summer from three days to two (in

³¹ *Ipswich Journal*, 16 Mar. 1765; *York Courant*, 26 Feb. 1765; *Sherborne Mercury*, 16 July 1764.

³² *Universal British directory*, vol. 1 (1791).

³³ National Archives, E 112/1646, no. 2,300; George T. Shaw and Isabella Shaw, *Liverpool's third directory* (1930), p. 95; Shaw and Shaw, *Liverpool's fifth directory* (1932), p. 111.

the latter case with a fare of only 2.6d per mile).³⁴ One of Hanforth's last advertisements announced in April 1777 a new service by diligence (a two-horse vehicle carrying three passengers) between Manchester and London, still taking two days, but here Hanforth and his partners were responding to competition.³⁵

Some time not later than 1766, Hanforth married Sarah Rhodes,³⁶ about whom nothing else is known. No children are recorded. There were changes in Hanforth's business partnerships, both along his coach routes and in London. As regards the former, it was as a partner in Hanforth's Manchester coach that Matthew Pickford the carrier first became involved in coaching.³⁷ For his London business, in May 1772 Hanforth took into partnership William Mountain, the son of a London coachmaster, but their partnership, as 'coach masters and stable keepers', was dissolved 'by mutual consent' in June 1773.³⁸ (Mountain was later a major coachmaster at the Saracens Head, Snow Hill.³⁹) In 1773, Hanforth announced that he had purchased the adjoining Castle Inn, Wood Street, and, in order to make the Swan with Two Necks 'the most compleat, uniform and quiet in the Kingdom', had rebuilt the Castle 'as an entire repository for carriages, the Swan being intended for board and lodging only'.⁴⁰ Hanforth also had other interests: he was a moneylender on a large scale, and in 1773 was said to be one 'who dealt largely in the discounting business'.⁴¹

By the mid-1770s, Hanforth appears to have been in financial difficulties (perhaps the reason for the rapid dissolution of the partnership with Mountain). Sarah Hanforth's will of 1774 left her property to Charles Skelton and Joseph Howell, and the

³⁴ *Derby Mercury*, 15 Nov. 1776; Raffald, *Manchester directory*; *Leeds Mercury*, 17 Sept., 26 Nov. 1776.

³⁵ *Manchester Mercury*, 8 Apr. 1777.

³⁶ National Archives, PROB 11/1006, Sarah Hanforth.

³⁷ *Manchester Mercury*, 8 Apr. 1777; Turnbull, *Traffic and transport*, p. 26.

³⁸ Guildhall Library (London), manuscript 6651/1, f. 124r; National Archives, PROB 11/943, William Mountain; *Williamson's Liverpool Advertiser*, 25 June 1773.

³⁹ National Archives, PROB 11/1482, William Mountain.

⁴⁰ *Williamson's Liverpool Advertiser*, 25 June 1773.

⁴¹ National Archives, C 12/1966/8. See also National Archives, C 12/537/52, C 12/1306/12, C 12/2082/3, C 217/128, E 112/1624, no. 1,596.

grant (of March 1775) recorded that her right to dispose of it was by virtue of a bond of 1766 in which Hanforth bound himself to Howell and another man in the penal sum of £1,800, suggesting an arrangement to protect a loan against the possible insolvency of Hanforth.⁴² Perhaps it was Sarah Hanforth's death which began the unravelling of Hanforth's finances. In 1777, Hanforth's involvement in stage-coaching came to an abrupt end. No more coach advertisements listed him as a proprietor after April, and by 24 September he ceased to be liable for rates on the Swan with Two Necks. The inn, but not the coaches, was taken over by Willson.⁴³ But it was too late for Hanforth, who was declared bankrupt at the end of November 1777.⁴⁴ Whether Hanforth's problems resulted from the stage-coaches or some other cause is unknown. Whatever the case, Hanforth's Manchester coaches certainly continued,⁴⁵ and so probably did his other coaches. The Manchester-London coach trade continued to grow, from Hanforth's three services per week in 1772 to 16 or 17 in 1788 and 21 in 1794. By 1790, mail coaches were performing the journey in 26 hours and other coaches in 28 hours.⁴⁶ In 1836, Manchester had 49 services per week to London, all involving the major London proprietors (Chaplin, Sherman, Horne and R. Nelson).⁴⁷

After his departure from stage-coaching, Hanforth became one of the marshalmen of the City of London. Policing in the City was the responsibility of the two marshals and their six marshalmen, whose duties included keeping the peace at executions and other public occasions and ensuring that the watch was kept. The marshalmen were being organised into a more effective force in the late 1770s, but it remained dangerous work,

⁴² National Archives, PROB 11/1006, Sarah Hanforth.

⁴³ Guildhall Library (London), manuscript 2518/70-83.

⁴⁴ *London Gazette*, 25-29 Nov. 1777.

⁴⁵ Four of Hanforth's partners in the new Manchester-London diligence in 1777 were among the five partners of the Manchester-London coaches and diligences in 1779 (*Manchester Mercury*, 8 Apr. 1777, 2 Mar. 1779).

⁴⁶ *Lewis's directory 1788*; *Scholes's Manchester and Salford directory* (1794); *Manchester Mercury*, 7 Sept. 1790.

⁴⁷ *Robson's London directory* (1836), with *Manchester Courier*, 13 Feb. 1836, col. 1a, for Nelson.

and in 1780 the marshalmen had to face the Gordon rioters.⁴⁸ Hanforth died on 26 March 1782.⁴⁹

Hanforth had been a major figure in stage-coaching for nearly 20 years. The typical coachmaster in 1760 had been a provincial innkeeper, horsing a single coach service or occasionally several services on the same road. Hanforth was different, as the first London innkeeper to assemble and maintain a network of services on different roads. In this, he set the course for stage-coaching as a business, and foreshadowed the famous coachmasters of coaching's golden age. He was also important in establishing coach services to the three largest towns in England still without them in 1760 – Manchester, Leeds and Sheffield. He provided a valuable addition to their transport facilities, which would rapidly increase in importance following his departure from the business.

⁴⁸ *Morning Chronicle, and London Advertiser*, 29 Mar. 1782, col. 3d; information from the Corporation of London Records Office; Donald Rumbelow, *I spy blue: the police and crime in the City of London from Elizabeth I to Victoria* (Bath, 1974), pp. 47, 91-92.

⁴⁹ *Morning Chronicle, and London Advertiser*, 29 Mar. 1782, col. 3d.