

Continuing

"STROUD NEWS"
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STROUD

- ★ *Bribery and Corruption*
- ★ *Fat Pigs Saved by the Bell*
- ★ *Stroud to London in 36 Hours!*

STROUD has one claim to political fame and notoriety. It has returned more members to Parliament in 13 months than any other constituency in the United Kingdom.

Under the Reform Act of 1832, Stroud as an important manufacturing town, was with 12 other parishes created a borough returning two M.P.s In December, 1873, one of the members died and at the bye-election which followed a Conservative was returned for the first time. Gladstone, who was then Prime Minister, dissolved Parliament soon afterwards. At the General Election two Liberals were returned, but both were unseated on a petition for bribery. At the next attempt one of each party got in, but again they were both petitioned against, though only one was unseated. So another election was held to fill the vacancy, but once again the successful candidate was turned out for bribery.

Once more Stroud electors went to the polls and this time

the winner, who was the grandfather of Mr. Stanley Marling, was not challenged. In 13 months there had been five elections, returning seven candidates, five of whom were unseated.

MEAT FOR SALE

The open yard which connects the Parish Churchyard with the High Street used to be the market-place of the town, especially for butchers, who brought meat for sale on Fridays. During those times it got the name of "the Shambles" which it still bears.

John Wesley preached his first sermon at Stroud, standing on a butcher's block in the Shambles.

On one side of the Shambles stands the ancient Market House (now called the Town Hall), supposed to have been built before 1594. To the ground floor of this house the butter-women and dealers in poultry and vegetables came on market days.

The first floor of the Market

House was used until 1865 as a schoolroom for the education of a number of boys who were maintained by charity. The boys' clothing was made from red cloth, and because of this they were known as "the Red Boys."

A pig market was held in the High Street, until 1825 when it was moved to the Cross. Local historian Fisher tells how Mr. Saunders, an attorney, living at Lower Grange, fattened some pigs for sale at the market. The pigs were trained to come for their food when a bell was rung. One day when Saunders had a score of pigs for sale at the market, the town crier rang his bell before making a proclamation. Immediately the whole score of pigs leaped over the hurdles and scampered home to the Grange, leaving the other pigs and the dealers very much surprised. Fisher might have given the other dealers credit for the opportune ring of the crier's bell. It would be worth the crier's small fee to clear the market of the Attorney's fat pigs.

FIRST STAGE COACH

The first regular stage coach service from Stroud to London seems to have been established in February, 1770, when a coach left the town twice weekly at 7 a.m. travelling up Rodborough Hill, through Cirencester and Oxford, reaching London in about 36 hours.

By 1795 things had been speeded up, and "Masters' Coaches" leaving London at 3

a.m. arrived at the Golden Heart, in King Street, some 19 hours later.

Thieves and highway men were very numerous, and to protect the coaches, the driver and guard were provided with blunderbusses. These weapons had bell mouths and were charged with gun powder, bits of glass, scraps of iron, etc., they could be depended on to hit their target and drop a highwayman in his tracks, provided they could be fired in time, which was not always the case.

In May, 1807, a company was formed to establish a rival service between Stroud and London, but it collapsed, and was succeeded by another which shared the same fate. In 1817 the "True Briton," owned by Mr. Richard Miller, was performing the journey in 13 hours, but three years later Masters' Coaches reduced that time by three hours.

The "True Briton" was replaced by the "Safety Briton," owned by a Mr. Cox of Chalford. In 1824 Messrs. Wakefield, Hayward and Co. established the Royal Mail coach, which left the old Lamb Inn at 7 p.m. daily, completing the journey to London in 12 hours. But the time was coming when the spread of a network of railways over the country was to drive the coaches off the road. This happened at Stroud in 1845, when a branch of the Great Western Railway that passed through the town was opened on May 14.