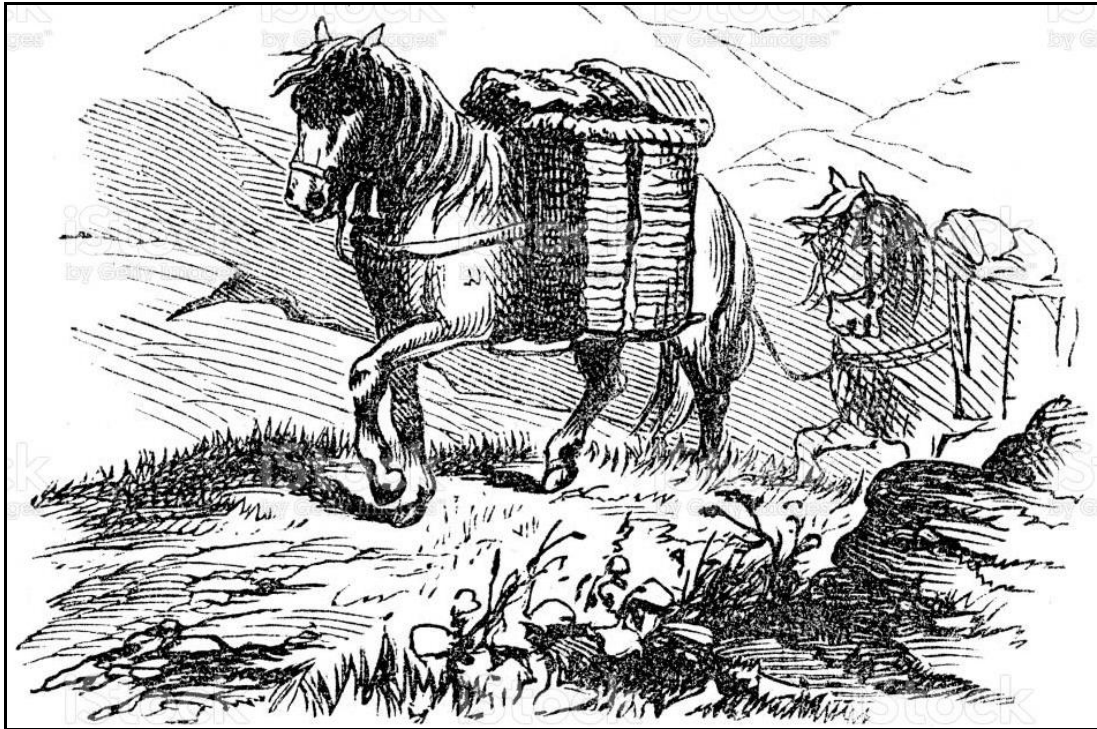


THE LOCAL HAWKING OF COAL BY PACKHORSES



BY SAMUEL T STEWART - AUGUST 2022

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INTRODUCTION

Before the development of the turnpike roads, preventing the efficient use of wheeled vehicles, goods of every conceivable kind needed to be carried on the backs of packhorses or sumpters (horses, donkeys, ponies or mules). Heavy goods like coal were mainly carried in basket work panniers slung on either side of the horse and mounted on wooden pack frames. Packhorses were a flexible and reliable means of transport, able to carry upwards of 400 lbs each dependent on their size over long distances.

From the earliest times coal was transported from local areas to Leicester by pack horse, via Ibstock, Bagworth, Desford and Kirby Muxloe to Aylestone. Here the track crossed the Soar by means of a pack horse bridge before entering the town of Leicester and thence to Coal Hill (or Berehill), a site now occupied by the Clock Tower.



AYLESTONE PACKHORSE BRIDGE, LEICESTER - c 15th century onwards

The cost of transport was considerable; in 1603 coal purchased at the pit-head for 1s 7d a ton sold for 10s in Leicester. This method was still being used in the early nineteenth century. Higglers purchased coal from stock yards at Swannington, Coleorton and the Smoile by the pack-load for example.

Throsby, in his historical writings on Leicestershire gave a vivid picture of the heavily laden horses, - "groups of crawling beings, enfeebled by oppression and often sinking under their loads, subject to the execrations and violent kicking of their masters".

There is little recorded history about packhorses in the local area so we are fortunate to have access to a copy of a story by the historian H. Butler Johnson who wrote c.1910 several articles about trades carried on in the area of Coleorton, which he had learned about from elderly local residents.

COAL COLLECTED BY WILLIAM BAKEWELL FROM THE OLD LOUNT PIT AT WORTHINGTON ROUGH

An occupation in the Cole Orton district which came to an end c.1850 was the hawking of coal carried on donkey's backs in large panniers. These donkeys were generally run in droves of fifteen or twenty, and the burdens they carried, so old residents have informed us, were almost unbelievable, as much as four hundredweight of coal being at times placed in the panniers of one of the little animals, a weight that bent it's spine into the form of an inverted arch.

The last drove, we believe, of these pack animals, nineteen donkeys and one small pony, was that of William Bakewell, who lived in the Bakewell's lane now named after him. Bakewell, who seems to have been the last man in Cole Orton to habitually wear a blue smock frock, was in the habit of fetching his supply of coal from the old Lount pit ([in the Smoile / Worthington Rough](#)).

On the way back home through the Woolrooms, the drove of burdened animals always lay down for a rest when they arrived at the bridge under the Coleorton railway ([on Aqueduct Lane](#)), and, until they had it, refused to pass the spot. Here the burdens were re-distributed, and the contents of the panniers to some extent lightened, not so much we fear for humanities sake, as for the fact that the coal was sold by the pannier, and not by weight, as the present law requires. For which relief, the donkeys, and not the customers gave much thanks.

WILLIAM BAKEWELL



The above could well have been similar to the blue smock frock described by Butler Johnson as being habitually worn by William Bakewell

The following 1841 and 1851 Coleorton census information shows a senior and junior William Bakewell with a variance in ages recorded between the two censuses, who both carried on the trade of coal carrier. It is not known whether the Bakewells' carried coal as far as Leicester. Sadly this couldn't have been a profitable business as William senior is recorded as a pauper in 1851, but still survived to a remarkable age for those times. Neither appeared in the 1861 census. They were living with Mary Wright (daughter & sister) who was a widow and her children.

William Bakewell	80		Coal carrier	Born Leics
William Bakewell	30		Coal carrier	Leics
Mary Wright		32		Leics
Jane Wright		8		Leics
John Wright		5		Leics
William Wright		7		Leics

From the 1841 Coleorton census

William Bakewell	88	Head	Widower	Pauper (former coal dealer)	Born Coleorton
William Bakewell	43	Son	Unm	Coal dealer	Coleorton
Mary Wright	42	Daughter	Widow	Lace worker	Coleorton
Jane Wright	18	Grand Daughter	Unm	Lace worker	Coleorton
John Wright	15	Grandson	Unm	Coal miner	Coleorton

From the 1851 Coleorton census

THE PACKHORSE INN - PRESTON'S LANE, COLEORTON

Licensing records for Ale Houses in Coleorton are available back to 1753. However, because there is no name for the Packhorse given in these records pre 1825, it is not safe to make assumptions about who could have been the licensees, although there has been a lot of conjecture about this without any conclusive proof at the time of writing so far as the author is aware.

Ale Houses did not have to be given a name or erect a sign until a new licensing Act came into force in 1825 and it was only necessary to provide a village location up till then. This coincides exactly with the inn being listed as the "Packhorse Inn" in the licensing records for the first time in 1825.

Jacob Webster was given as the licensee of the Packhorse Inn from 1825 to 1827. Thomas Stinson (former licensee at the "Bell Inn", Coleorton), William Kirby and William Stretton, all of Coleorton, provided the surety for those three years respectively. Either one or two people were required to stand surety, generally for the sum of £10 each.

Interpretation of the Ale House licensing records pre 1825, suggests that Jacob Webster would have been the licensee of the Packhorse for the period from 1819 through to 1825 also. Surety was put up by William Earp in 1820 and in 1822/23/24 by Robert Kirby, all being of Coleorton.

There is no further mention of the Packhorse Inn in the licensing records for 17 years until the Ashby Register of full licensees lists James Gough as the licensee of the Packhorse from 1842 to 1851. It is assumed that it was at this point that the Packhorse finally ceased to be used as an Inn.

James Gough was at the Kings Head (later named Kings Arms) from 1852 to 1858 and no further mention is made of the Packhorse. Enquiries into what happened to the Packhorse during those 17 years of not appearing in the licensing records has drawn a complete blank.

Later in the 1850's the cottage, thought to be the original Packhorse Inn (see following photograph) was reputedly known as "Ned Gough's Cottage". By then, Ned was an agricultural labourer, so this seems to align with the closure date suggested above when James Gough moved to the King's Arms.

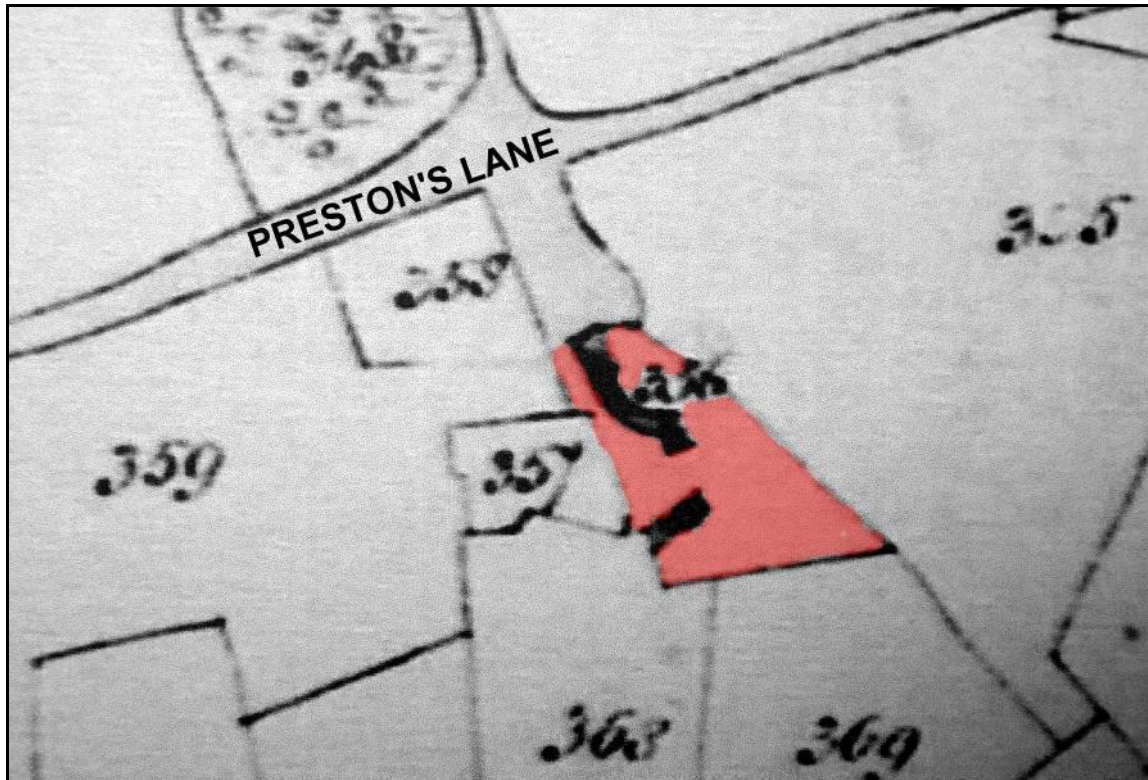
It is not unreasonable to assume that the Packhorse Inn which formerly stood on the south side of Preston's Lane received its name from the fact that Pack Horses were kept near the premises.

A number of factors contribute to the evidence that the "Packhorse Inn" was situated in Preston's Lane. The main piece of evidence confirming this is the fact that the register for the 1842 Tithe map of Coleorton describes Plot 356 as being **Packhorse Inn and garden - 1 rood 28 perches**. There follows an extract from the Tithe map showing plot 356 coloured pink in relation to Preston's Lane.

The map shows a substantial building at the north end of the plot and what is assumed to be a barn at the southerly end. It cannot be an accident that the surveyor

deliberately drew a distinctively arced building, which maybe suggested stabling for the horses.

It is reasonable to believe that Pack Horses driven by a Hawker would have been kept here and rested in between taking coal from the adjacent local coal pits to surrounding districts.



EXTRACTS FROM 1842 TITHE MAP



The above map shows the geographical relationship of the Packhorse Inn to the wider area

- Plot 356 (The Packhorse Inn & garden) coloured red,
- Preston's Lane coloured pink
- Coleorton cross-roads coloured green

The house as we see it in the following photographs is thought to encompass at least a part of the former "Packhorse Inn". A modern residence, named "The Sycamores", still exists on the site and the original building has clearly seen many changes in use and style over the centuries.

The present owners of "The Sycamores" are of the view that the original house was built around the mid 1700's and has the date "1767" carved into a beam above one fireplace - in local style of brick and timber construction possibly using some beams from a previous 16th century building. Apparently, many beer bottles were discovered in the garden during renovations.

There is some evidence of narrow 2 inch deep bricks used in the property suggests 17th or 18th century construction.



End part of the property pre-1960s, thought to have been the site of the Packhorse Inn



Sycamore House in 1936 when viewed from the front