

THE FALMOUTH PACKET STATION

In 1635 Charles I opened his Royal Posts to general use. This new public service for inland letters included a postal route to the South West, linking London and Plymouth.

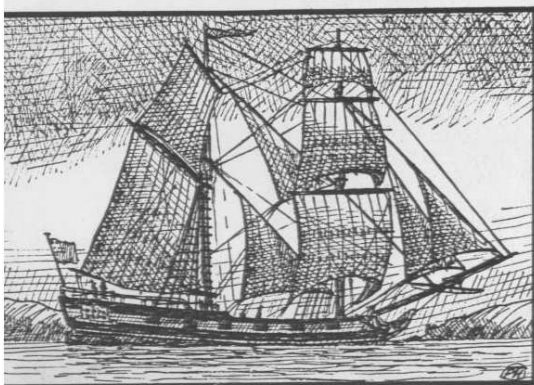
The following years saw Great Britain frequently at war with her European neighbours. Inevitably, the English Channel became unsafe for British shipping and so, from 1688, Falmouth became the port for mail for Spain and the Mediterranean fleet in place of Plymouth. By 1763 Falmouth had also become the Packet Station for trans-Atlantic communication.

Seagoing mail was prepared by the Packet Office, where it was wrapped in brown paper and oiled cloth. This was then put in weighted leather portmanteaus and stowed aboard under tarpaulins. Often, the mail would contain sensitive official dispatches and so, if under threat of capture, the Captain's first duty was to throw the mail overboard to sink. Bullion sometimes formed the cargo of homeward bound Packets which, upon arrival at Falmouth, was transferred to a wagon of Russell & Co. and taken by road to London under military escort.

At first, mails between London and Falmouth were carried on horseback, but in 1785 a Mail Coach service was introduced to Exeter and from 1799, further road improvements allowed a through service to Falmouth.

At its peak, some 30 sailing Packets were operating on the Falmouth Packet Station. The brigantine shown below is typical of the 18th century: a Packet of the 19th century can be seen on the plaque at Custom House Quay. In times of war and piracy, many heroic actions were fought, Falmouth men sacrificing life and limb to defend the mail and precious cargo in their charge.

As steam replaced sail, Falmouth lost out to Liverpool and Southampton, and the year 1850 saw the last of the Falmouth Packets.



Packet Brigantine



Mail Coach



LEAVING THE OFFICES, KILLIGREW STREET EVERY MONDAY AT NOON AND ARRIVING AT THE CASTLE AND FALCON INN, ALDERSGATE STREET, LONDON, ON THE FOLLOWING SATURDAY? JUNE. 1833.

Russell's Wagon

