

Fig. 7. Daily Services in north-west Kent, 1836. See also Fig. 6.

amount of daily traffic on all roads, including local services.<sup>19</sup> Greenwich is omitted from Fig. 6 since the vast number of coaches between that place and London – some three hundred daily! – is too large to be mapped. A large number of coaches also plied the roads between Greenwich/Blackheath and Woolwich (some ninety-four daily), a third of them being local services between the two places, the rest being London coaches. Beyond the metropolitan area the busiest section of the London–Dover road was between the individual Medway towns, which had a vigorous local traffic as well as being, collectively, a minor focus for routes from Malling (non-daily), Maidstone, and Brompton. No fewer than forty-six coaches passed between Rochester and Chatham, forty-three between Rochester and Strood. Between the metropolitan area and the Medway Towns there was a relatively high traffic, especially from London to Dartford and between Gravesend and the Medway Towns. Deeper into the Kentish countryside, Sittingbourne, though not a local centre of importance, was the connecting point for coaches to Sheerness on Sheppey (non-daily) and for Maidstone, so that a quite high traffic density resulted, particularly on the short stretch of road between the centre of Sittingbourne and Key Street to the west. A great many coaches continued to Canterbury, a smaller number to Dover. From Canterbury, too, a number of local coaches ran to the coast, including the Thanet towns. Within this whole area also there was a network of local services, linking all the main settlements one to another, all but Goodnestone having a daily service. Especially lively were the roads between Margate and Ramsgate and Sandwich, with Deal only slightly less served. From Canterbury to Deal (*via* Sandwich) was a Royal Mail local route. At other times the road between Canterbury and Margate was also a Royal Mail local route,<sup>20</sup> though not in 1836.

The second most important route, as already indicated, was the Royal Mail route to Hastings. Twenty-six coaches reached Bromley each day, though ten of these continued no further. Of the rest, a few went on to Westerham, whence was a local route to Edenbridge, but most continued on the main road through Sevenoaks to Tonbridge. From here most continued on the Royal Mail route to

<sup>19</sup> On these maps (and in the accompanying paragraphs) a return journey is counted as *one* journey between places, as, of course, is a single journey. Thus, if one return journey and one single journey were made daily between X and Y, this is taken as a total of *two* (not three) journeys between X and Y.

<sup>20</sup> See map in R.C. and J.M. Anderson, *Quicksilver: a Hundred Years of Coaching, 1750–1850*, Newton Abbot, 1973, 10, which shows the mail routes in May 1807; cf. also Fig. 1.

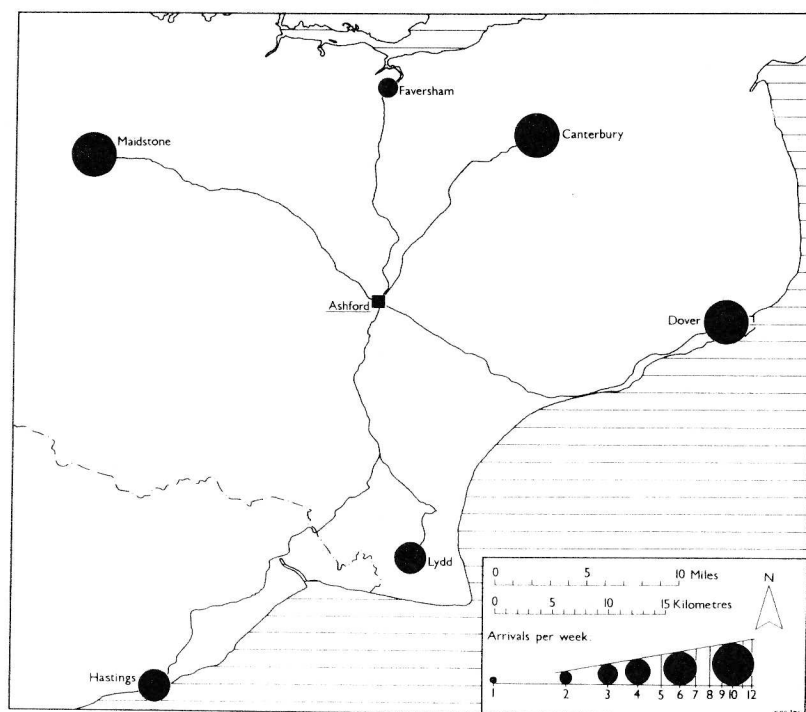


Fig. 8. Ashford as a local Centre, 1836.

Tunbridge Wells, where a great proportion terminated. A smaller number continued and were rejoined between Wadhurst and Robertsbridge by those which had branched off at Tonbridge to pass through Lamberhurst (cf. Fig. 4 and accompanying text).

Less frequent services occurred on the London–Maidstone–Ashford–Hythe route, although there was still a very good service as far as the county town. This was also a local focus, connected with the two Royal Mail routes at Tonbridge, the Medway Towns and elsewhere, and with other places such as Cranbrook and Tenterden which were not on the Royal Mail routes. Beyond Maidstone the service was much diminished. Only three coaches per day reached Ashford from the county town, although the former was once again

a local centre with a direct route through to Hythe and Folkestone, and with connections for Ospringe/Faversham, Canterbury, and Dover, Lydd, and Hastings. Thus, Fig. 7 brings out much more clearly than Fig. 2 the fact that that portion of the county east and south of Tunbridge Wells, Maidstone, Sittingbourne, Faversham, Canterbury, and Dover was much less well served than the regions to the west and north of that line. Within the area only Ashford was at all important as a local centre, although Hythe was passed through by a number of coaches *en route* to other destinations. Only a few terminated, or started, there.

The position of Ashford as a local centre is shown in Fig. 8, which, like all the succeeding maps of local services, omits the through-routes from London. The most frequent services were, expectedly, to the county town, to Canterbury and to Dover, with less frequent services to Hastings, Lydd, and Faversham. Of these services those to Faversham and Lydd were run by Ashford proprietors whilst the others were operated as return journeys from the towns shown on the map. All except Faversham had a daily (Monday–Saturday) service. The Ashford–Faversham coach ran only on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays. Clearly, Ashford owes its importance as a local centre to its position at the focus of a number of roads to important neighbouring towns and villages, and this in turn is due to its geographical position at the foot of the North Downs scarp and at the entrance to the Great Stour gap which gives direct access through the North Downs to Canterbury. This position makes it suitable not only as a local market but also as a Wealden outlet.

The local traffic out of Dover (Fig. 9) was much busier. Canterbury was excellently served, whilst Margate (*via* Sandwich), too, had a good service. Frequent coaches also journeyed to Hastings, Hythe, Deal, and Herne Bay (*via* Canterbury). Dover's importance as a port and its position at the end of the principal Kentish route from London are sufficient explanation of the town's importance as a local centre for the coaching business.

Margate as a local centre (Fig. 10) was much more limited, its coaches following the north and east coastal roads except on the journey inland to Canterbury. There was an extremely busy traffic to the nearby town of Ramsgate and very good services to Canterbury and Dover. Since the Deal and Dover coaches passed through Sandwich that town also was very well served, although only those coaches which terminated at Sandwich are indicated by the proportional circle on Fig. 10. By the beginning of the nineteenth century not only was Margate within a densely populated part of the county (Thanet), but to its minor importance as a port had been added a

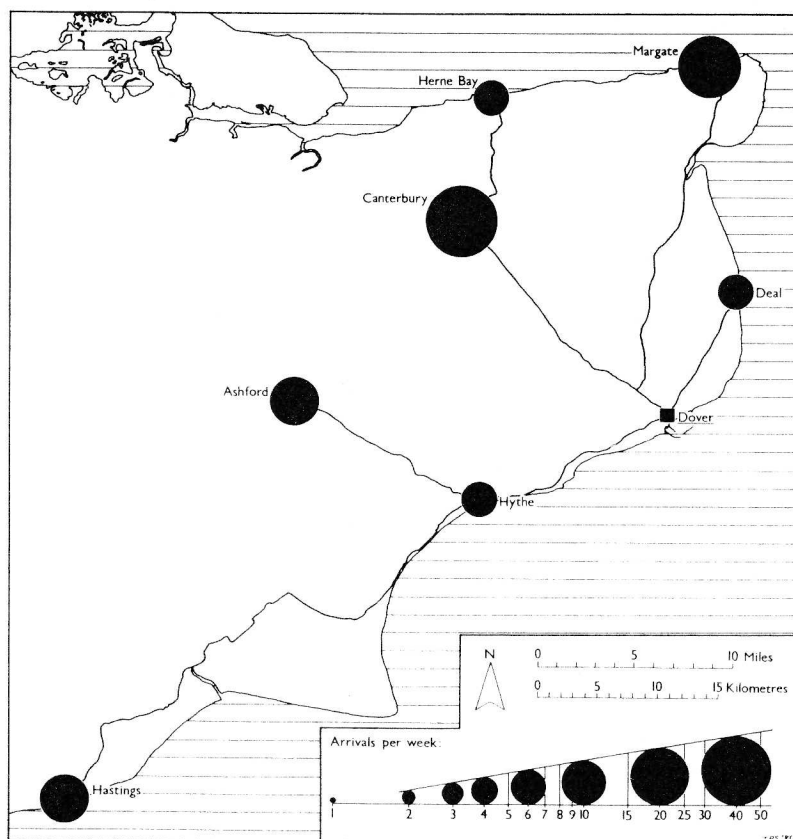


Fig. 9. Dover as a local Centre, 1836.

new function as a seaside resort town, along with Ramsgate.<sup>21</sup> Visitors to one of these towns frequently journeyed to the other. Furthermore, travellers by steamboat from London to Ramsgate preferred not to round the North Foreland, but to disembark at

<sup>21</sup> Jessup, *op. cit.* (1974), 143. Effectively, Margate was already a hundred years old as a seaside resort in 1836; by the 1830s, however, coaching services along the Dover Road and to Thanet were being threatened by steamboat competition.

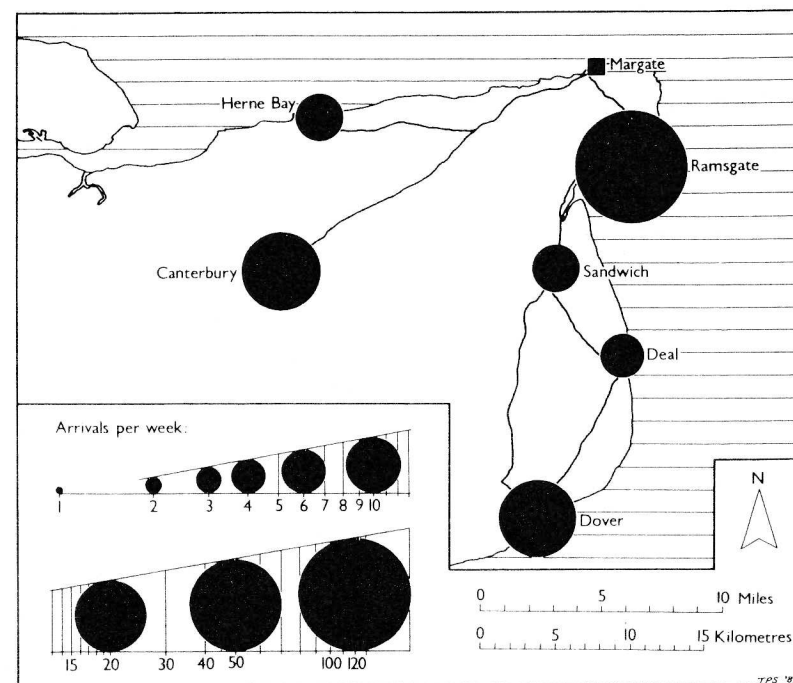


Fig. 10. Margate as a local Centre, 1836.

Margate and continue overland. The route between them could thus support a good local coaching service in 1836.

A much more inclusive service, and one spreading over a much wider area, was operated out of Canterbury (Fig. 11), the pre-eminent town of east Kent. Coaches thence reached to all the important coastal towns from Herne Bay round to Folkestone, as far east as Rochester and Maidstone, southwards to Ashford, and to a number of smaller places as well: Charing, Wye, Barham, and Goodnestone. The coastal towns were the best served, reflecting Canterbury's importance as an interchange for many of the London coaches. Folkestone's relative unimportance may be gauged by the small number of local coaches arriving from Canterbury (three per week) compared with the large numbers arriving at Herne Bay, Margate, and Ramsgate (twenty-eight each), and Deal (thirty-five) and Dover (forty-four). Ashford and Maidstone were the next best

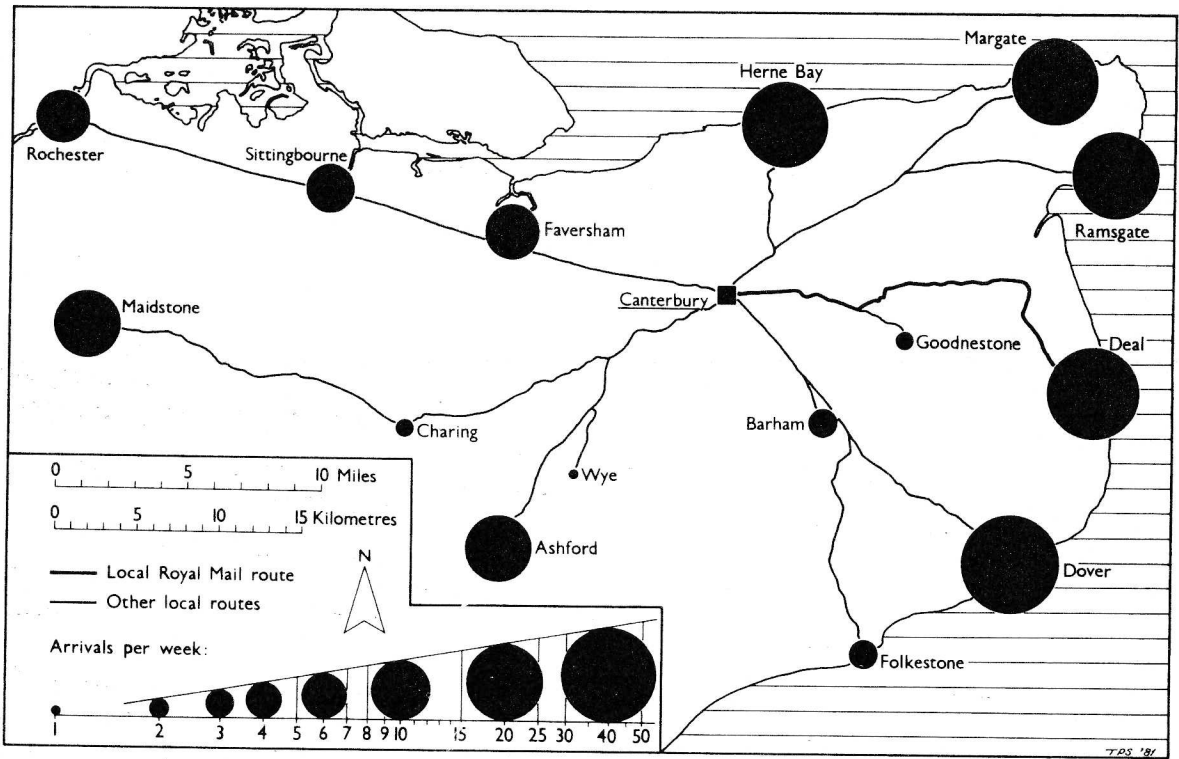


Fig. 11. Canterbury as a local Centre, 1836.

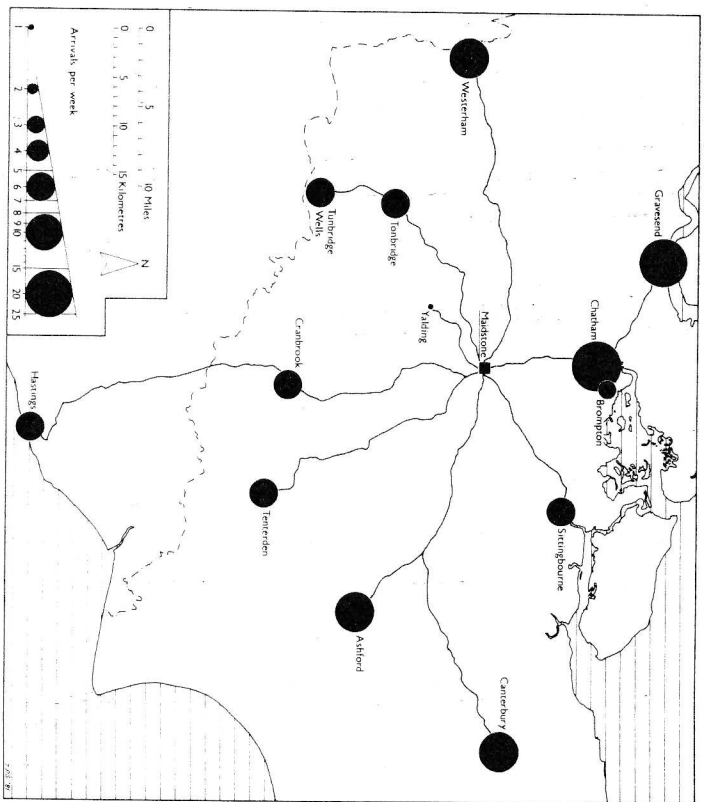


Fig. 12. Maidstone as a local Centre, 1836.

served, followed closely by Faversham, Sittingbourne, and Rochester (the first two augmented by the Rochester coach which passed through them).<sup>22</sup> The smaller and less important localities were served correspondingly more meagrely: none had a daily service (cf. Fig. 7).

The most extensive local service was that centred on Maidstone (Fig. 12), a reflection not only of that town's status as regional capital of west Kent and the principal Wealden outlet, but also of its proximity to the Medway Towns with their important military and

<sup>22</sup> Strictly speaking through *Ospington* and *Sittingbourne*.

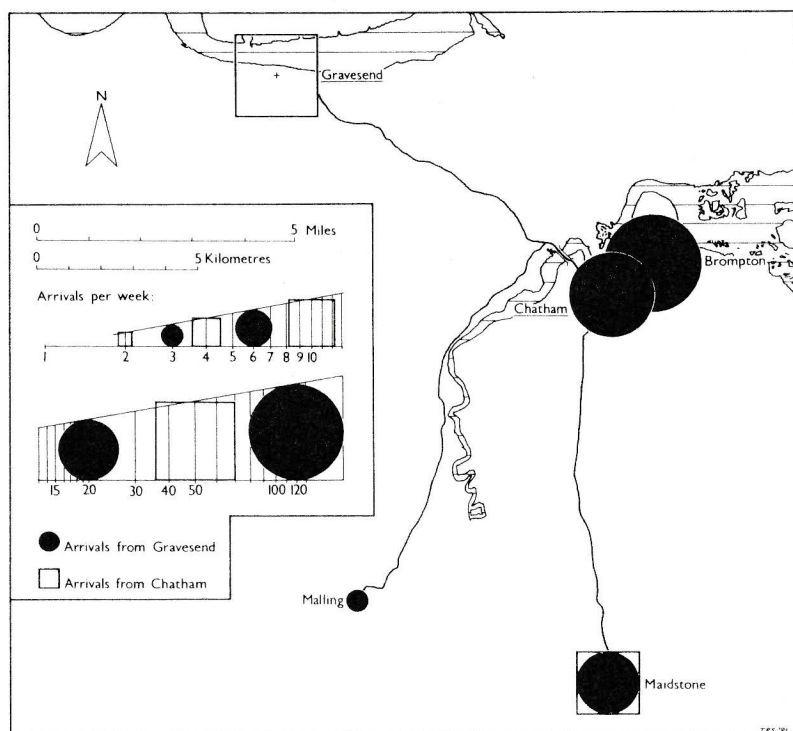


Fig. 13. The Medway Towns as local Centres, 1836.

naval installations.<sup>23</sup> Its geographical position at the first crossing of the River Medway above Rochester Bridge also made it a natural meeting-point for roads – hence for coach traffic – from all over the county. It was Chatham, together with Brompton (non-daily), that was best served by the Maidstone coaches, although nearly as many

<sup>23</sup> "The principal productions of these towns," says Mr Pickwick, "appear to be soldiers, sailors, . . . officers, and dockyard men." C. Dickens, *The Pickwick Papers*, 1836–7, ed. R.L. Patten, Harmondsworth, 1972, 83. On Maidstone as regional capital of west Kent (and Canterbury as regional capital of east Kent) vide A. Everitt, 'Country, County and Town: Patterns of regional Evolution in England', *Trans. Royal Hist. Soc.*, xxix (1979), especially 89–107.

reached Gravesend with its important local and continental shipping. Canterbury, Ashford and Westerham, at the extremities of the area served, received frequent coaches from the county town, whilst Sittingbourne, Tenterden, Hastings, Cranbrook, Tonbridge and Tunbridge Wells were all well served. There was also a non-daily service to Yalding (cf. Fig. 7).

The importance of the Medway Towns (Fig. 13), so far as coaching is concerned, lay in their position on the main London–Dover road; although receiving a good deal of traffic – much of it from London, but with a good service, as we have just noted, from Maidstone – they were themselves of less importance as local centres. Indeed, Strood and Rochester were not local centres at all, whilst Chatham sent local coaches only to Gravesend and Maidstone: the former was better served, doubtless because of the importance of the shipping. Gravesend itself had a large number of coaches running to both Chatham and Brompton, a smaller number to Maidstone, and just a few (three per week) to Town Malling. The importance of Gravesend arose from the expanding steamboat traffic of the 1820s and '30s, many passengers continuing their journeys into Kent by road from Gravesend.

Although some of the local services – particularly in the vicinity of London – were run by the large London-based proprietors as extensions of their metropolitan-centred routes, others were run by truly local men, who provided valuable connections with the principal lines of communication. The centres from which these local proprietors operated are shown in Fig. 14. Two patterns may be discerned, superimposed, in this map. In the first place, and expectedly, the towns already distinguished as local centres were important bases for local operators: on the main London–Canterbury–Dover road were Gravesend, the Medway Towns, Canterbury and Dover itself, together with Margate on the main connecting route with Canterbury; on the more south-easterly route were Maidstone and Ashford. Secondly, places at some distance from London, and predominantly on or close to the estuarine or sea coasts, provided business for local proprietors, whose coaches connected either with the London traffic or with the local services from the more important centres. The principal local centres of this second category were: Sittingbourne (four proprietors), Herne Bay (six), Ramsgate (ten), and Deal (five), with Faversham (two) of minor importance. Away from the coast, Westerham had three local operators, Greenwich, Woolwich and Tunbridge Wells two each. Other places, as indicated on the map, provided further infill of services by supporting only one operator each. These, too, fall into two categories: in the Maidstone area or between Canterbury and

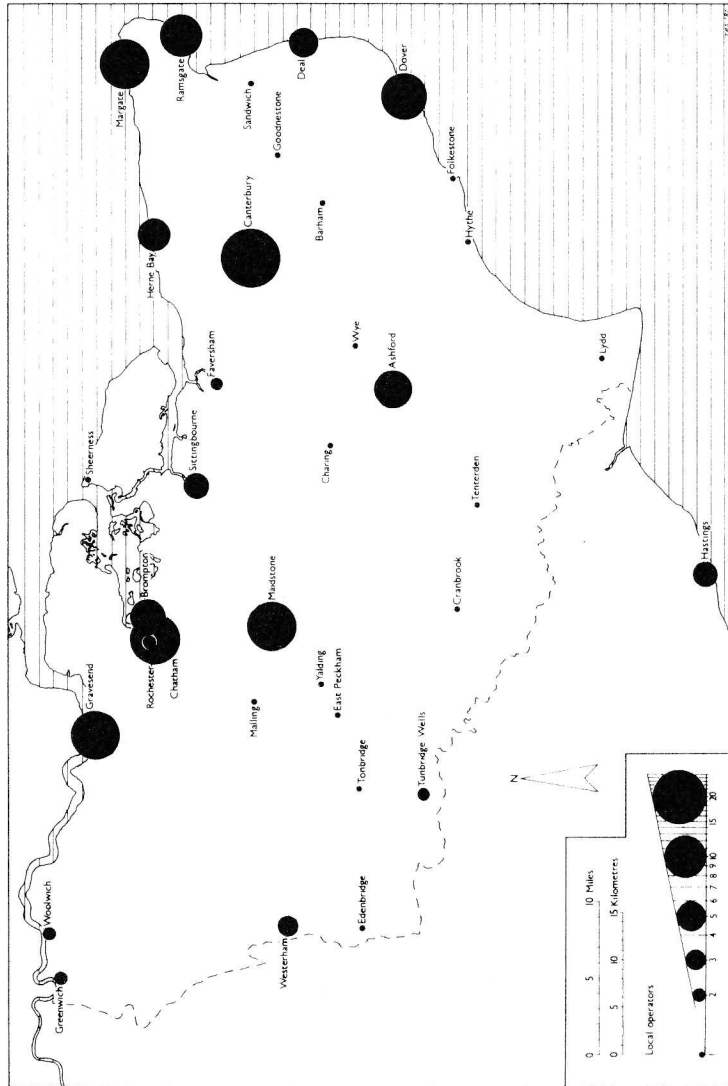


Fig. 14. Centres from which local Operators worked, 1836.

the north-east coastal towns the fairly busy trade was already pre-empted by the London-based proprietors or by local operators in the larger centres, and there was clearly but little scope for further stage-coach operation from lesser centres. The area closest to London – defined by a line joining Westerham, Tunbridge Wells, Maidstone, the Medway Towns and Gravesend – is a special case of this category: only on the periphery of this area were there local operators, and then only one each, at Edenbridge, Tonbridge, East Peckham, Yalding and Malling: the interior of the area was entirely empty of local operators, apart from those on the River Thames at Greenwich and Woolwich. Clearly the London-based services were fully adequate to the needs of the area. In the second category belong those regions where, as on Romney Marsh, the Hoo Peninsula and Sheerness, the population was so low, the settlement so sparse, that little in the way of local services was required: in particular, there were very few members of those classes well off enough to be able to travel by stage coach – never a cheap means of transport.

By this combination of metropolitan and local proprietors, working coaches to and from many parts of the county, a comprehensive coaching network existed in Kent in 1836. No part of the county was inhibitive far from a service – even though the more remote parts were not served on a daily basis – and there were specially good connections between the major towns, between these and the capital, and, *via* London, between Kent and the rest of the country. Indeed, it seems likely that some of the more important routes were actually overworked, with the various stage-coach services tending not just to complement but rather to reduplicate one another.