Bridlington Postal Services

The postal service in Britain goes back much further than many people think; in fact there was a sort of post in Roman Times, but it really came into its own when Henry VIII needed a rapid update on military events in those turbulent times. This need of course carried on throughout the Tudor period and one thinks of Elizabeth I and her troubled times of intrigue, plotting and suspicion of plots and treason. Anyone who has studied this period would know that Walsingham was a great one for intercepting and reading other peoples letters!

It was Charles I who decided to formalise the system and in 1635 he made a proclamation, on the 31st July, to set up a postal service; mainly of course by courier on horseback and on foot. This too was always likely to be a risky operation, as Henrietta Maria found to her cost when her first letter to King Charles from the East Riding was intercepted by the Parliamentarians. Her second one had to go via a very circuitous chain of 'safe houses'.

The first attempt at a penny post was tried by William Dockwra in 1680, although after many trials and tribulations and some fraud, the Government took it over in 1682 with still only limited success due to the administrative complications.

By the 18th century however couriers were providing regular postal services in addition to their normal carriage of goods and people. By the latter part of the Century coaches and mail coaches took over until the arrival of the train in 1830 in London.

It is not easy to discover how quickly the letters took but certainly at the time of John Paul Jones's escapades in 1779, local letters only took a couple of days. Some of these letters still exist, warning of his arrival off our Yorkshire coast, so we can gauge how long they took from their dates. So how did this happen?

Many coaches ran through Bridlington more or less daily, particularly on the Whitby, Scarborough, Bridlington and Hull route and we also had a daily horseback link to York via Sledmere, and Malton. We had three main coaches, the Wellington, the British Queen and the Britannia.

They stopped in the Quay and also in the High Street. So it was a quite sophisticated service for the time and particularly under the conditions of the very poor roads. The turnpikes did improve the situation but in the East and North Riding they came a bit too late to save them from the speed of the trains. The mail was still subject to security problems and there were several recorded instances of the 'post boy' being robbed of his horse and mail on the York to Malton road. However many of the problems were overcome when the train 'took the strain' in Bridlington in 1847. The North Eastern Rail Company won the contract to carry the mail between major centres and it was only local deliveries which were done by horse or on foot.

In the late 18th and early 19th Centuries sending a letter was very expensive as each letter was charged on how far it had to go. So, for example, a letter sent in 1811 from Bridlington to London cost £2.39 (the equivalent of £52.10 today) so well out of reach of the ordinary person. We can see an example of this need for knowledge of mileage from a milestone set into the wall of a shop in the High Street opposite the Globe Inn. It seems odd to have the distance to Sledmere, but as we have already seen, the post went that way to York.

Early Post Offices in Bridlington

The history of Bridlington's post offices and post masters is a 'game of two halves'. The Old Town, being the initial centre of commerce, was the main office and the Quay a relatively minor affair.

The first recorded office in the Old Town was recorded in 1767 and managed by a Mr Henry Cook, although its location has not been discovered yet. Neither are we exactly sure where the second one was, although we do have a few clues. It is recorded as being in the 'Fish Shambles', near the Black Lion in the High Street; but there are no records of this facility. It is also likely that fish was sold on a daily basis from the Quay or Flamborough direct and a market stall unnecessary. However there are records of the 'Flesh Shambles', which were stalls set up at the Market Place end of High Street, and I now believe that it was in this area that the office was located.

The first definite location is where the Globe Inn is now and we have shown a photograph in the previous edition of "The Chartulary". This

office was run by Thomas Cape and his family who also ran a grocery shop and wine merchants. This was the main office for some time, however due to the reversal of roles throughout the 1800's, the Quay grew in importance and the Old Town declined.

The Quay post offices were centred around the Prince Street area. The first one in Commercial Place, the second in Cliff Terrace, the third in Queen Street and lastly, of course, in Quay Road where it still is; although it was a bit modified by the Luftwaffe in the war!

Brought up to Date

• By 1872 we were having three daily deliveries, the first at 07:50, the mid day post at 12:15, and the last post at 5 o'clock.

• The post from major towns and even London was received at the post office the next day or the following day at the latest.

• The cost had come down similar to that of today's rates.

• So have we really progressed over the last 100 years or so?

Bro Brian Osborne

The four properties above faced south overlooking the harbour and occupied what is now Garrison Square. One of them was at one time a post office. We would like to know which. Do you have any photographs we can look at?

The photograph below shows a post office in Prince Street in a different period. The large house you see was the Rickaby Mansion built c.1710 and last occupied by the Rickaby family in the 1860s. The last remnants