

Cymdeithas Hanesyddol Tyddewi a Phebidiog St Davids and Dewisland Historical Society

Post Haste -Early Post in Pembrokeshire Roger Antell



The first records of a postal service, according to the Records of the Privy Council, date from the last year of the reign of Elizabeth I but it was not until the reign of Charles I (1635) that the postal service became available to the public (to make money for the Crown)! To speed up the delivery of the post this required the making of new 'roads' and this made it possible to complete the journey from London to Edinburgh in just 5 days for the post-riders, with points for changing their horses along the way. Other routes included the Great North Road, the road to Holyhead (and Ireland), Dover (and the continent), Falmouth and Bristol (through to west Wales - though not a permanent way). The Civil War brought a halt to all further work until the cessation of hostilities. By the time of the Restoration, and the appointment of Henry Bishop as Post Master General (1661) the first post-mark was introduced ... "A stamp is invented, that is putt upon every letter shewing the day of the moneth that every letter comes to this office, so that no letter Carryer may dare to detain a letter from post to post ; which, before, was usual". Post from St Davids would have to be taken to Pembroke and from there it joined the main postal service to London. Post would have to be collected from Pembroke on the return, or had to be arranged to be conveyed locally. Post **from** London was the only post that was stamped ... and it was the **recipient** who paid the costs not the **sender**! Address were often long – and descriptive – as there was no standardised 'postal address' at the time.

Mileages were calculated according to standard distances with 2d between 4 score and 140 miles and 4d about 140 miles **per sheet** in the package though all post – wherever the Receiving Office – went to London before being sent on to its final destination. This meant the receiver (or sender by the 1800s when post could be pre-paid) had to pay two rates ... **one** to London and a **second** to the destination. The 'Post-bag' was made up in London and carrying the post was by a man on horseback, changing horse at each 'post-stage' – normally an inn (e.g. Harp Inn Letterstone). When the coaches replaced the post-riders the routes had to change and the standards of the 'roads' had to be improved dramatically (unlike the post-riders the coach could not use the shallow ford at Laugharne)! Turnpike Trusts had to raise money to pay for the improvements in the roads ... and it is the imposition of fees at each turnpike, on each business using the road, that was behind the Rebecca Riots. By the end of the 18th century many centres of population in Pembrokeshire had their own 'Receiving Offices' but the north of the county continued to be poorly served until the introduction of the '5th Clause Post' or 'Penny Posts'. Then more local posts were set up, with post collected and then be delivered to the main Receiving Office, and thence to the main post office. As a part of this improvement the first Receiving House was set up in St Davids and Solva (1826).

1869 saw St Davids with its own office number, EO8, but all post continued to be sent to Haverfordwest for processing – even if the destination was enroute (and Solva actually handled more post than St Davids)! The 1830/40s Census had Henry Stephens, High Street, Post Master, replaced by Wm Williams, 'Postmaster and Draper', initially from 'Court House' before being moved to the Gwalia (Window on Wales). When he retired his son held the position until the turn of the century. 1900s has the Post Office in Captain's House (National Trust shop) then in 1911 Clara Evans, wife to Chemist William Evans, Cross Square, had taken over as Post Mistress and the Post Office was in the Chemists!

