

The Post Office in Dawlish over 220 Years

Background

The public mail service, The Royal Mail, was introduced by Charles I in 1635. At this time the mail was moved by postboys on foot or by horse from 'one post' to the next 'post'. To start with there were just four post routes, based on old Roman roads, one of these was London to Plymouth, with a post at Chudleigh, over the next two hundred years these grew into a complex matrix. Mail for Dawlish was collected and delivered to Chudleigh. Onward collection to Dawlish needed to be privately arranged, either by specially hired messengers or from any local resident who was going to Chudleigh and willing to pay any charges on the letter. In 1784 the first mail coaches were started, speeding up the delivery time, with the Exeter to Plymouth mail coach stopping at Chudleigh. Up until the first postal stamps in 1837 the recipient of the letter or parcel paid the postage, in 1787 it was reported that a one-page letter between London and Devon would cost 5d or 6d dependent on distance.

In 1739 an entry in the Dawlish Parish Records reads: *paid for one letter the postage from Plymouth and posting of two letters 6d.*

In 1780 an unofficial post office was established in an Inn in Dawlish where letters could be left or collected for a 'Postboy' to dispatch.

1799 – The Establishment of Postal Service from Chudleigh to Teignmouth

This led to an official Receiving House being established in Dawlish, at Mrs Crispin's house, two doors down from the Red Lion public house on Old Town Street at a cost of £3 annually. Letters posted here were taken to Teignmouth and forwarded to Chudleigh. The revenue from Dawlish was £140 annually. By 1808 Dawlish was becoming 'a watering place of much resort', and it was decided time had come for an official delivery of mail to the town. An official Penny Post, (technically called a 'Fifth Clause Post' because it was established under the provisions of the fifth clause of the Post Office Act 1801) was established between Dawlish and Teignmouth. Dawlish letters were charged an extra penny for carriage to and from Teignmouth. The cost of the service was estimated at £31-4s-0d, but in addition there was a payment of compensation of £30 annually to the Teignmouth Postmistress. Prior to the establishment of the Penny Post, she had received (and acknowledged in her Property Tax returns), about £30 per year for the delivery of Dawlish letters, which was her personal perquisite. In view of this she was awarded an annual sum of £30 for as long as she remained postmistress at Teignmouth. The new Dawlish Post Office made a profit of £54-3s-11d in its first year, not allowing for the compensation, and local application for the removal of the extra penny charges was not agreed to.

New Post Route

In 1812 a new Penny Post was set up from Exeter, through Starcross to Dawlish and onto Teignmouth, and the delivery route from Chudleigh stopped. In 1814 Miss Gibbon, the daughter of a retired Post Office official was appointed as 'Receiver of Letters' at a salary of £21 annually, which was to cover the expense of house-to-house delivery throughout the town. In 1817 the Post Receiving house was kept by Mrs Lowe in Brunswick Place.

Dawlish was connected in a Post Office robbery on 23rd October 1816, when a Mr Caddy a Postboy carrying the mail from Teignmouth was assaulted and robbed near Alphington. The assailant was described as a young man mounted on a grey horse. A horse exactly answering the description was taken from a field at Dawlish on the Wednesday night and returned to the same place before daybreak

on the Thursday. The Postboy was so badly injured, with a double fractured skull that meant he was unfit for further service and pensioned by the Post Office.

In 1823 it was proposed to change the time of the last evening collection from 7pm to the earlier time of 5.30pm; keeping the last arrival from Exeter the same at 7pm. The reason was to prevent the days' delay in post from Dawlish and Teignmouth which were going west from Exeter, which accounted for more than 50 letters from Dawlish every evening. Mr Hoare of Luscombe Castle complained that the new arrangements would curtail the time available for answering letters, however the Postmaster General, Lord Chichester, ruled that "the arrangements were too good to be disrupted", and the proposed alterations took place.

Becoming a Post Town

After continued petitions to remove the Penny Post surcharge on Dawlish letters, it was decided in 1828 that Dawlish could become a Post Town in its own right. Even allowing for the removal of the penny charge and the salary of a Postmaster it was considered that the revenue would increase to about £900 annually. The Letter Receiver salary had been £25, the Postmaster was £55 annually. The Post Office was established in a building called Transpontia, later in 1897 it was known as Greenland but officially called Brunswick Place (then Mill Row) and the first Postmaster was John Lowe, son of the previous Letter Receiver, he remained in this post until 1866.

Postal Charges

Charges at this time were high and graduated according to distance, with additional surcharges on the number of pages the letter consisted of. The Reverend Holmes complained that some letters from Exeter were being charged at 7d in place of the usual 4d. In 1823 the last post in Exeter for letters to Dawlish on the Exeter to Dawlish route was 3pm, however between 3pm and 6.30 letters were then sent via Newton Abbot and Teignmouth for delivery in Dawlish at 9am the next morning. This Newton Abbot route was longer and therefore more expensive, so it was agreed to stop it, unless marked otherwise.

At this time the cost of a letter to London was 11d, the highest rate which had ever been charged. During 1837-38 Mr Fudge of Dawlish campaigned for the reduction of the letter rate between Teignmouth to Dawlish from 4d to 1d by establishing a Penny Post bag between the two towns. He was not successful, however in 1838 there was a general reduction in the rate of distance of less than 8 miles to 2d. Following protests from around the country and the campaign of Rowland Hill there was established a uniform rate in December 1839 of 4d for any distance, followed in January 1840 the uniform Penny Post that stayed as the minimum letter rate until 1918. This also introduced the stamp, the first being the Penny Black; this also changed to the sender of the letter paying for the postage and not the receiver.

The Post Office Moves

In 1838 the Post Office moved from Brunswick Place to the Strand end of Piermont Place, opposite the recently closed tourist office. The Dawlish Gazette report of 1897 remembered that at this Post Office you stood outside at a wooden sliding door in all weathers and knocked to draw the attention of the Postmaster to obtain a stamp. During the 19th century the Post Office would move first to the bottom of Strand Hill on the corner with Park Road (now High Street), then on to the Strand in the building that is now the butchers.

Post by Train

In 1838 an Act of Parliament permitted mail to be carried by 'iron mail' as well as by 'flesh and blood' ones. So, with the opening of the South Devon Railway as far as Teignmouth in May 1846, Totnes in 1847 and Plymouth in 1848 a new era started. A Travelling Post Office was established from Bristol to Plymouth, with the Teignmouth and Dawlish mail travelling by rail from Exeter, with the old road route only going as far as Starcross.



Sunday Post

In July 1847 Mr Carr, the Secretary of the South Devon Railway proposed that the Mail Train should be suspended during the hours of divine service. However, this proposal was not agreed by the Postmaster General, Lord Clanricarde, who ruled that the company was required to deliver the times of dispatch agreed in their contract.

In 1848 the second Sunday delivery was discontinued, and the office closed for business at 10.00am on Sundays.

Post Office Expansion During the Second Half of the 19th Century

In 1852 an Ashcombe office was established this was served by a rural messenger. With the messenger receiving 7/- per week and the Dawlish letter collector 12/-. Wages were not generous for those working for the post office at this time, and the hours long and arduous, an example of this can be read in appendix 1.

In 1856 a pillar box was established in Old Town Street, it is believed this was the first in the town, see appendix 2 for the list of 20th century post boxes.

Business continued to increase, and the Postmaster gained an allowance of £15 for an assistant and in 1860 a third delivery was put in with an auxiliary letter carrier employed on 3/6 a week.

In 1862 the postal business at Holcolombe had increased sufficiently for free delivery of letters there, and in 1863 a wall letter box was erected at Holcombe Villas.

1863 saw the Sunday post-delivery discontinued in both Ashcombe and Dawlish.

From the 1869 Guide to Dawlish by W M Cornelius

The Post Office is situated at the corner of Park Street (bottom of Strand Hill), and Miss Pessell has been lately appointed Postmistress. Letters are delivered from the London mail at 7.00am; from the north, Sunday excepted, at 10.45am; and from the west and London at 4.15pm. Mails are dispatched for London at 8.35pm; for the north at 2.55pm; and for the west at 8.35am. A Day Mail for London at 11.45am; letterbox closes at 11.35, extra stamp until 11.40. Letters may be registered for a single fee until 8.00pm, with a double fee until 8.35pm. Money orders are granted at the office, Sundays excepted, for nine am to six pm, and on Saturday from nine am to eight pm. On Sunday the office closes at 10.00am, but the letterbox remains open, and the mails are dispatched as above. The pillar letterbox on Regent Street, closes for the London mail at 8.10pm, and for the north mail at 2.10pm. The wall letterbox, Holcombe, is cleared at 5.00pm on weekdays and at 7.30am on Sunday. The wall

letterbox, Mount Pleasant Inn is cleared at 5.30pm on weekdays. There is a post office savings bank at the Post Office in Park Street.

The End of the 19th Century

In 1892 the main Post Office was on The Strand and there was a sub-Post Office at West End, on the corner of Old Town Street and Regent Street. The town's residents tended to use the West End Office and the visitors The Strand Office. It was reported in 1897 that 20 people were employed at the Post Office with letter and parcel collection and delivery, newspapers, money orders and telegraphs.



At the turn of the century Mr W H Reed was Postmaster on a salary of £140 annually, compared to £3 for a Letter Receiver a century earlier, see appendix 3 for the comprehensive list of opening times, last posts and deliveries from the Dawlish Gazette of 1901.

The 20th Century

The 20th century saw the opening of sub-Post Offices on Exeter Road and in Dawlish Warren, the Warren office is now closed. It saw the end of Sunday deliveries and then of Sunday Post Office opening, the end of afternoon deliveries and earlier closing of the offices.

In September 1914 Dawlish changed from being an independent Post Office to a Sub Office of Exeter, with a sub-postmaster on a reduced salary.

In 1936 Dawlish had 27 post boxes, see appendix 2 for their locations. The main Post Office on the Strand was open on weekdays from 8am to 7.30pm and on Sundays and Bank Holidays 9-10.30am. Latest time for posting at the Post Office was – parcels 7.30pm, letters 8.30, Sunday 6.50. London letters at 8.30pm, suburbs 4.05pm, London same day delivery 9.10am. Midland, North, Ireland and Scotland, parcels 1.15pm, letters 4.05pm. There were three deliveries a day at 7am, 10.30am and 5pm (not Thursday). There were telephone kiosks on Marine Parade, the bottom of Queen Street, at the GPO office, West End PO, Clifton Place, Holcombe Smugglers Lane and Ashcombe PO.

Ashcombe post office closed in 1950.

In 1958 despite a lot of petitioning against it, the West End Post Office closed, and in 1959 the main office moved from The Strand to Brunswick Place, the building is still there. In 1961 Miss M J Brooks became Postmistress, taking over from Mr J J Wallace who had been Postmaster since 1949. Then in 1997 the Post Office moved back to the Strand to its current position.



Holcombe Post Office

The first post office and associated shop opened in the village in 1907 by 17-year-old Mary Jarman, later Mrs Marlow, in the parlour of the end cottage opposite the church, as seen in the photo. By the second World War it had moved to Sorrento at the top of the Village Hill. Mrs Marlow was followed as Postmistress by Peggy Sweetzer, her daughter, then it passed into the ownership of Mrs J Price and then Fred Comber. In the early 21st century, it moved to Mr Geoff Oldacre's adapted bungalow on Holcombe Road. The Post Office in Holcombe was closed in 2008.



Suzanne Jones

April 2022

Acknowledgements

The bulk of this article is taken from two articles written by Mr H G Morgan and published in the Dawlish Gazette in April and May 1960. For this Mr Morgan thanked Mr R E Collier in his work of finding the information from newspapers, guides and manuscripts. He also, thanked the staff of the GPO record rooms in London for additional information.

Holcombe Post Office information and the letter from Samuel Pepell are from the Dawlish Local History Group Newsletter of January 2009 by Pam Robins.

Cornelius Guide Dawlish 1869 - published by W M Cornelius, 15 The Strand, Dawlish

Notes on Old Dawlish, F J Carter. Dawlish Museum Publications 1, 1976

Article in The Dawlish Gazette May 29th, 1897

Other information from Dawlish History Society archives held at Dawlish Museum

Appendix 1

Letter from Dawlish Letter Carrier

18th May 1853 "To the Right Honourable Viscount Canning, Postmaster General

Your petitioner, Samuel Pepell, Letter Carrier under Dawlish Post Office, most humbly begs to lay before your lordship the daily engagements of his town and county labours, feeling certain he has only to state the arduous nature of those duties to gain you favourable consideration. In the first place, he begs to state that he attends the Post Office every morning at 4am to take the bags to the mail for the west, returns with the London letters, assists in sorting them and then his first town deliveries which occupies three hours. Secondly, he attends the Post Office at 11am to convey the bags to meet the second mail to the west and returns with the bags from the north. Thirdly he proceeds to a village called Holcombe about 1 ½ miles west of Dawlish, distributes the letters, returns to the office in time to convey the bags to meet the 2pm North Mail and then commences his second town delivery of the north and west letters. Fourthly he proceeds to a village call The Warren (and distributes the letters) about 2 miles east of Dawlish. Fifthly he attends the office at 8pm to convey the bags to meet the London Mail.

For the above duties he receives 14/- a week, 7/- for his town delivery, 5/- for attending the Mails and 2/- for his Country duties of 7 miles in contrary directions. He most humbly prays your Lordship will cause inquiry to be made into the above facts and grant such additional remuneration as your Lordship may consider he justly deserves."

This petition was signed and endorsed by a personal letter from the Honourable and Reverend C G C Talbot of Piermount House, who wrote on April 1st, 1853. *"My dear Canning, this comes to inform you that I have just signed a petition to you on behalf of the letter carrier of this place who appears to be sadly overworked and underpaid. He works from 4am to 8pm, has to meet 6 trains, also 2 deliveries in Dawlish each occupying 3 hours, 2 hours to deliver in 2 villages, 3 miles in opposite directions. This with his work in the office is a pretty good day's work for 14/- per week.*

The letter was passed to Anthony Trollope for his expertise and the detailed report signed by him outlining his proposal for the distribution of mail both from Dawlish to Holcombe, Ashcombe and The Warren and from Teignmouth to its outlying villages.

The outcome was that the Postmaster General approved that the Dawlish letter carrier may be relieved from the delivery in Holcombe, the letters for that place being so few, and as his duties under the alteration will still be severe, he did not recommend that any reduction should be made to his wages.

Appendix 2

Post Boxes Around Dawlish

1936	1966	2022
West End Post Office	Moved to Park Road 1958	Yes
Barton Hill	Suspended by PO in Brunswick	Yes
Badlake Hill	Yes	Yes – on corner with Meadow Rise
Church Street	Yes	Yes
Old Park Villas	Yes	No
Holcombe PO	Yes	Yes, x2 outside the last two PO
Holcombe Villas	Yes	Yes
Marine Parade	Yes	No
East Cliff	Yes	Yes
Sea Lawns	Yes	Yes
Radfords	Yes	Yes
Luscombe	Yes	Yes
Railway Station	Yes	Yes
West Cliff	Yes	Yes
Ashcombe PO	Yes	Yes
High Street	Yes	Yes
Oak Hill	Yes	Yes
Stonelands	Yes	Yes
Mount Pleasant	Yes	Yes
Eastdon	Not in Dawlish area now	
Hensford	Yes	Yes
Warren	Yes	Yes
Port Road	Yes	Yes
Sutterton Lane	Yes	Yes
Sunnydale	Yes	No
Stockton Hill	Yes	Yes
Week	Yes	Yes
	Coronation Avenue	Yes
	Exeter Road	Yes
	The Avenue	Yes
	Five Lanes	No
	Teignmouth Road	Yes
	The Strand	Yes
	Lower Dawlish Water	Yes
		South Down Road
		Richards Close
		Carhaix Way

N.B – during investigating the current post boxes, three new ones were found, however the author did not search the new housing estates, therefore there could be more than listed.

Appendix Three

Postal service 1901

Post Office, Dawlish.		Buil
MR W H REED, POSTMASTER		
HOURS OF ATTENDANCE		PAR
WEEK DAYS.		
For sale of postage stamps, registration of letters, &c ...	7 a m to 9 p m	Spe Outside descrip of Gre
Postal order business ...	" "	
Money order and Savings Banks, government annuity and insurance business, and issue of licences ...	8 a m to 8 p m	
Telegraph business ...	" "	
SUNDAYS.		
For sale of postage stamps, registration of letters, &c ...	8 a m to 10 a m	BO
Telegraph business ...	" "	
INWARD MAILS.		
LETTER MAILS. —Daily—Town delivery—London (night) & all parts, 7 a m; week days only—North of England, Scotland, Wales, Southampton South-west of England, Exeter, Plymouth, 10 20 a m; London, Ireland, Bristol, Exeter, Taunton, &c, 2 45 p m; London, Exeter Newton Abbot, Teignmouth, Plymouth, Cornwall and Torquay, 6 45 p m.		Beg ally, add and patr
PARCEL MAILS. —London and all parts, 8 30 a m, London North & South-west of England, Exeter, 2 45 p m; London and all parts, Newton Abbot and Teignmouth, 6 45 p m.		
OUTWARD MAILS.		
LETTER MAILS. —Week days only. Newton Abbot, Plymouth, Teignmouth, Torquay, Exeter, Cornwall, Bristol and Birmingham, 8 45 a m; London, Exeter, &c, 9 45 a m; Dawlish town delivery, 10 20 a m; London, Barnstaple, Bath, Bristol, Exeter, &c, 11 50; Newton Abbot, Plymouth, Teignmouth, Torquay, &c, Cornwall, 2 5 p m; Dawlish town delivery, 2 35 p m, North of England, Scotland, Wales, Ireland; Southampton and South-west of England, Exeter, Taunton, &c, 4 15; Dawlish town delivery, 6 35 p m; London (night) and all parts, 9 20 p m		Z lea for Co Fo c I A ap zs in ci ea ar of W P A L A
PARCEL MAILS. —Exeter, 9 45; London, Barnstaple, Bath, Bristol, Exeter, &c, North of England, 11 50 a m; Exeter, Salisbury, North of England, &c, 3 45 p m; London (night) and all parts, 9 p m		
FOREIGN MAILS,		
OUTWARD — LOCAL POSTING. —Continent to Europe, daily: *Egypt, Monday and Friday, 9.4 a.m.; India, Ceylon, *China, Strait Settlements *Australia, and *New Zealand, Friday, 9 45 a.m., Cape of Good Hope, Natal and Transvaal, Friday, 9 20 p.m.; *United States and *Canada, Tuesday and Friday, 9 20 p.m.; West Indies and Pacific, alternate Tuesdays, 9 20 p.m		
*Also by other Packets and routes on various dates		
HOMEWARD —Due at port of arrival: Sunday and Tuesday—India, Japan, Australia, China, Egypt and Ceylon; Monday—Cape of Good Hope and Natal; Wednesday—United States and Canada.		