

"Essex Post Goes and Coms. Every Day"

By L. J. JOHNSON

THE early hand-stamp used in the year 1674 advertised the daily postal service to the county of Essex, a service which has developed from a single post road to the present-day delivery to every town, village and hamlet.

The main post road has been from London, through Chelmsford to Colchester, on to Ipswich, thence branching to Norwich and Yarmouth. The foundations of this road were laid by the Romans for their Great Road to Colchester, and has since served as the main route of communication.

The early postal services in Essex were developed at the end of the 15th century, at the time of the Wars of the Roses. Many letters were carried by casual travellers, others by carriers, for a fee. These carriers, organised by commercial interests in London, served the eastern area of the country, which was unscathed by the war, and was the centre of the weaving industry. The safe delivery of these letters was a matter of chance.

The well-known letters written about this time by the Paston family, living near Norwich, have been preserved. Many of these would have been carried along the Essex roads and they include references to the various travellers to whom they were entrusted.

Important travellers on the road included the Royal couriers carrying messages to the palaces at Havering and Purgo.

The unofficial carrying of letters was regularised by King Henry VIII with the appointment of Sir Brian Tuke as Master of the Post in 1516, and the offer of a service to the public. By 1569 there was a municipal post at Ipswich, where the postmaster was required to bring all the letters for the town from London.

Organised mail services to East Anglia date from the 17th century. Jasper Grove, the postmaster at Ipswich from 1620, was the first to establish posts between London, Norwich and Yarmouth. At first a bi-weekly service, 40 years later it was going three times a week.

Thomas Witherings, "Postmaster of Great Britaine and foreign parts", resided at Hornchurch, in Essex. From 1635 to 1637 he organised a national network of post roads. In 1653 a post road to Yarmouth was established, a branch to Harwich was made in 1660 to serve the recently-organised packet service to Holland, and another branch to Norwich was added soon after. The journeys were made three days a week until 1673, when the service became available six days a week as far as Colchester. From 1755 there was a daily service to Norwich, Yarmouth and Harwich.

In the early days the carriage of the mail by the post-boy on the road through Essex was not without difficulty. Owing to



the bad state of the road, the speed on the Yarmouth road in the year 1666 averaged 3½ miles an hour instead of the regulation speed of five miles an hour in winter and seven miles an hour in summer.

Robbery was another hazard. In 1686 the post-boy was robbed by a highwayman near Ilford bridge, 10 miles from London. The Essex road to Norwich, passing through numerous towns and villages, was considered by travellers safer than the other post road to Norwich, which branched from the Great North Road and crossed the lonely heath between Newmarket and Thetford, the scene of many robberies.

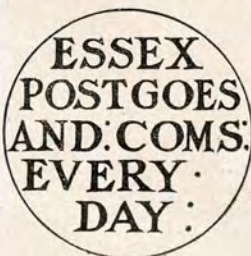
The postal service in the county was expanded by the setting up of bye-posts. By 1672 there were bye-posts from Chelmsford via Thaxted to Saffron Walden, from Kelvedon to Braintree, and from Colchester to Lavenham in Suffolk. After 1720, with the expansion of the cross-posts under Ralph Allen, the post from Colchester was replaced by one from Chelmsford to Sudbury and Bury to connect with the other post road to Norwich.

With the establishment of the post road, Brentwood, Chelmsford, Witham, Kelvedon, Colchester and Harwich became post towns, each with a postmaster or "deputy", as they were known. The postmaster was usually a tradesman, using his premises as the post office. In addition to receiving and despatching the mail, he was required to list on a way bill each letter received in his office. The salary varied. In 1677 Thomas Langley, at Harwich, received £10 per annum. In 1686 Samuel Newton, of Kelvedon, £2 per annum; and Anthony Brasier, at Ingatestone, £40 per annum.

An example of the many difficulties experienced in administering the G.P.O. is shown by an extract from the letter book of the Deputy Postmaster-General, Colonel Roger Whitley. In 1674 he wrote to Mr. Spicer, the deputy at Romford:—

Upon Saturday last was brought to the Office a Holland Maile on a Porters Back, w^{ch} is a most scandalous thing and such as I never knew committed. I had the management of this affaire, let me know how & by whom you sent it and why it came so hither, should this come to the Sec^{ry} eares, the Offender, would certainly be called to a strict accōpt, pray be more careful for the future, or you shall suffer for it."

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The first Essex "slogan" postmark (left) and a new discovery first reported in 1963.

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Stage coaches were introduced in the 18th century, following the improvement in the roads due to the setting up of turnpikes. The first regular coach in the county was the "Norwich Machine", which commenced in 1762. The mail continued to be carried by post-boy until 1785, when mail coaches to Norwich and Yarmouth were introduced. The post was exempt from paying turnpike tolls. The Norwich mail coach served all the post towns on the road, and completed the 113-mile journey in just over 15 hours. The Yarmouth coach was an auxiliary coach, running from London, serving only the post towns on the road from Ipswich to Yarmouth, and covering the 143 miles in 18 hours.

The mail coaches induced expansion of the post, and in the early 19th century there were horse-back bye-posts, to towns like Dunmow, Orsett and Felsted, which received direct mail bags and became post towns. Other bye-posts were Brentwood to Southend, then coming into favour as a fashionable watering place, and also Chelmsford to Maldon and Southminster, with a foot-post to Bradwell.

Further expansion followed under an Act of Parliament in 1765, which authorised the setting up of Penny Posts, serving an area limited to 10 miles from the post town. The penny posts operated by means of rides from the post town to receiving houses in neighbouring villages. One of the earliest in Essex was at Kelvedon, first proposed in 1809, the earliest recorded covers being for 1811. In that year the largest penny post in the county was established at Romford, which eventually had 18 receiving houses, served once daily by mail carts on three rides. The earliest recorded dates for the penny posts of Essex are:—

Town	Date	No. of Receiving Houses	Town	Date	No. of Receiving Houses
BRAINTREE	1822	5	HARWICH	1817	4
CHELMSFORD	1817	2	KELVEDON	1811	1
COLCHESTER	1818	13	MALDON	1812	9
DUNMOW	?	1	ROCHFORD	1815	5
HALSTEAD	?1815	9	ROMFORD	1811	18

In addition to these penny posts, a number of villages in what is now metropolitan Essex were included in the country area of the London Penny Post. In 1794 there were 13 of these receiving houses in Essex, to which the charge was twopence. By 1801, when it had become the London Twopenny Post and the country charge had risen to threepence, there were 20 receiving houses in the county, to which the principal ride was from the Chief Office to Woodford, with a branch from Stratford to Romford.

In the mid-19th century there was much railway building in Essex. The Eastern Counties Railway to Colchester was completed in 1843, and in the same year the railway commenced carrying mail. Messengers were appointed at post offices served by the railway, to collect mail from the trains. Not all mail was carried by train, owing to the charges levied by the railways, 80 lb. of mail being charged the equivalent to the fare for 16 passengers. Railway lines rapidly extended through the county, and within the next decade many other towns were receiving mail by rail.

Owing to the port of Harwich not being served by rail, the Continental mail service was transferred to Dover in 1836. As a result, a railway line to the port was eventually built and opened in 1854.

The first sorting carriage on the line through Essex was the Ipswich Sunday Sorting Tender (which used a rectangular I.S.T. hand-stamp) introduced in 1849, in order to reduce the labour force required in London on Sunday. Letters from towns near London were carried by the "Down" train to be transferred to the "Up" train for sorting before arrival in London. In 1858 the Ipswich District Sorting Carriage was established, letters for London being sorted into districts. This was the

WITTHAM

Fig. 1. 1794.

KELVEDON

Fig. 2. 1796

CHELMS
FORD

Fig. 3. 1796

CHELMSFORD
29

Fig. 4. 1810

DUNMOW
—
—

Fig. 5. 1823

ONGAR
NO
29

Fig. 6. 1825

BRENTWOOD

Fig. 7. 1829

WITTHAM

Fig. 8. 1831

MANNINGTREE

Fig. 9. 1836

ROCHFORD
DE 17
18 41

Fig. 10. 1841

Typical postmarks dated to indicate style for each period.

forerunner of the present East Anglian T.P.O., which runs in both directions from London to Norwich. Lineside apparatus has been used at a number of towns on this route since 1858.

When parcel post was introduced in 1883 the railways received 55 per cent of the gross receipts. The G.P.O. thought this excessive and introduced a number of Parcel Mail Coaches.

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The London-Colchester Royal Parcel Mail, drawn by four horses, in a snowstorm. The name of the contractors, C. Webster Ltd., appears on the cart. The driver is named by the artist as S. Horne. The picture was painted in the early 1900s, hence the Royal Cypher "E.R."

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In Essex, parcels were conveyed from London to Colchester by a four-horse van, and then by cart to Ipswich, with a similar arrangement for the "up" journey. (In 1963 the G.P.O. introduced a similar scheme in East Anglia; road transport being used to convey parcels in bulk between "concentration centres" for distribution, Chelmsford and Southend being the centres in Essex.)

Prior to 1765 the Post Office carried mail to the post town and did not, outside London, undertake delivery to the addressee. In many cases, local arrangements were made for messengers to collect the letters, or postmasters arranged delivery under the Fifth Clause of the Act of 1801, as a convention and not as part of the post office service. The postmasters were able to charge for this service, as did Mr. Barlow, postmaster at Romford, who up to 1816 charged ½d. on each letter delivered.

In the mid-19th century the delivery areas were constantly being expanded, mainly by rural postmen who made journeys on foot of up to 15 miles a day, seven days a week, for a wage of 12s. a week. Other modes of transport were also employed: Herbert Massey, in 1858, delivering mail by donkey and cart from Grays to Vange.

In the larger towns there were extensive daily deliveries. In 1867, at Romford, deliveries were made at 6.30 a.m., 9 a.m., 2.30 p.m. and 7.30 p.m., and an additional delivery at 8.25 p.m. was provided in 1895, making a total of five deliveries daily.

Essex was in the Eastern District of the G.P.O. The Surveyor of this district from 1859 to 1867 was Anthony Trollope, the novelist. Living at Waltham Cross, he visited many post offices in the county and instituted improvements in the delivery service.

Most types of postal markings have been used in Essex. The town name stamps, with and without mileage marks, in the horizontal and circular forms (Figs. 1 to 10) are familiar. The Penny Posts gave rise to a variety of marks, framed and unframed (Fig. 12). The duplex marks (Figs. 13 and 14), including the post office number, were used at all the post towns. At Chelmsford in 1870-71 the number 169 was used in error for 176. A distinctive Maltese Cross was used at Chelmsford (Fig. 11). Squared-circle type date-stamps were succeeded by circular date-stamps, followed ultimately by the Krag and Universal machine cancellations.

The building of new towns like Harlow and Basildon have altered the status of these offices. In 1793 Harlow was a sub-office under Sawbridgeworth. It had become a post town by 1820, and is now a Head Post Office with five sub-offices. The development of the postal services in the county continues, the population now approaching two million also continues to expand, so that the present number of over 750 post offices may well increase in the future.



Fig. 11. 1844 Chelmsford

ROCHFORD
Penny Post

Fig. 12. 1810



Fig. 13. 1858



Fig. 14. 1868

U.K. Stamp Section of World Tape Pals

Membership of the Stamp Section of the World Tape Pals organisation in the United Kingdom has more than doubled within the past 12 months—thanks to STAMP COLLECTING, whose story of W.T.P. resulted in enquiries from all over the world, including the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

This stamp club-with-a-difference was formed by British members of the international, Texas-based, World Tape Pals organisation, which exists for the personal exchange of ideas and information on tape.

Members of the Stamp Section exchange material and, on tape, advice, information and comments. A newsletter, *Philatape*, is issued monthly and includes a quiz, letters, section news and information on philately generally.

The section is in close contact with the stamp sections in many other countries, although full membership of the U.K. section is open only to collectors normally resident in this country.

Several members also contribute to a "Round Robin", which is a tape sent on a circuit, by the Secretary, at two-monthly intervals to discuss the running of the section. Few of these members, however, have actually met.

One member is now living and working in Germany, but still retains contact and contributes to each tape, which he receives in Bremen from a lady member in Scunthorpe and passes it on to another member in Manchester. The *Philatape* is now to receive articles from a collector in New Zealand, who is a specialist in N.Z. stamps.

Details of membership are obtainable from the U.K. Stamp Section Secretary, M. A. Brownrigg, 5 Oaklands Drive, Bridgend, Glam.

Life in the Solomon Islands

The promised new definitives for the British Solomon Islands are expected late in September. They are being printed in offset lithography by De La Rue in sheets of 60 on Block CA paper in designs by M. C. Farrar Bell. All values include a Dorothy Wilding portrait of the Queen. The whole gamut of life in the B.S.I. has been drawn on for the designs, which are: ½d., Makira Food Bowl; 1d., Dendrobium Veratrifolium; 1½d., Scorpion Shell; 2d., Hornbill; 2½d., Ysabel Shield; 3d., Rennell Is. Club; 6d., Moorish Idol; 9d., Frigate Bird; 1s., Dendrobium Macrophyllum; 1s.3d., Dendrobium Spectabile; 2s., Sandford's Eagle; 2s.6d., Malaita Belt; 5s., Ornithoptera Victoreae; 10s., White Cockatoo; £1, Figured Western Canoe.