

THE POSTAL HISTORY OF BAWDSEY AND BAWDSEY FERRY, by Mrs. G. Driver

My interest in these two post offices of a small village on the Suffolk coast began when first finding postcards with Bawdsey and Bawdsey Ferry markings. Deciding to visit Bawdsey, three members of the EAPHSC set off one sunny day, through Woodbridge and Melton, across Sutton Heath (of ship burial fame) through Alderton, where we passed the present post office stores on the left and a few yards further a notice reading ' Old Post Office Lane ', and on to the coast.

The first post office we reached was Bawdsey, also a stores. The big surprise here was the letter box built under the window being Edward VIII, this is not in the official records so we considered it a find. The post office had previously been across the road under the care of the Dosser family. The last of the family to have the office was Miss Dosser, and it was obviously during the short reign of Edward VIII when the change occurred and a new box installed for the new office.

On to the ferry. A ferryman in a motor boat was conveying a few RAF men over to Felixstowe, no sign of a post office here. A few enquiries led at least one member of EAPHSC to venture past the guards of H.M. Air Ministry. Even when it was explained the latest ' Post Offices in the United Kingdom ' listed a Bawdsey Ferry Office, so it must be open to the public, no avail, the guards insisted on escorting us politely off the ground.

Some months later a decorator having just finished his work on the den at 76, Rushmere Road, demanded to know why it all had to be covered with ' them old post office things '. When he realised the importance of such relics, he proudly stated he was connected with the P.O. through his aunt, uncle, grandmother and grand-father, all of whom had served at Bawdsey. One of us asked, not one Mahershalaahashbaz Dosser?' ' that's right, he was my grand-father said our decorator.

Grand-father kept the general stores besides the post office and carrying the mail daily to and from Woodbridge by mail cart. He was what his grandson called ' a rum old boy '. When his cat began stealing food from the stores he tried to stop it, finally the cat was put in a sack and taken to the top of the cliff at high tide, and thrown over.

The next morning the postmaster was preparing the mail cart for the early run when a bedraggled cat slunk into the yard. It was lifted up by the scruff of its neck and dropped into the mail bag with the letters, and thrown into the cart. Reaching the centre of Sutton Heath, the postmaster drove off the road some distance and taking the mail bag out of the cart, released the poor cat. As can be imagined, it bolted over the heath and far away. Two days later it turned up once again in the post office yard. The postmaster knew when he was beaten, the cat was allowed to stay, and lived to a ripe old age.

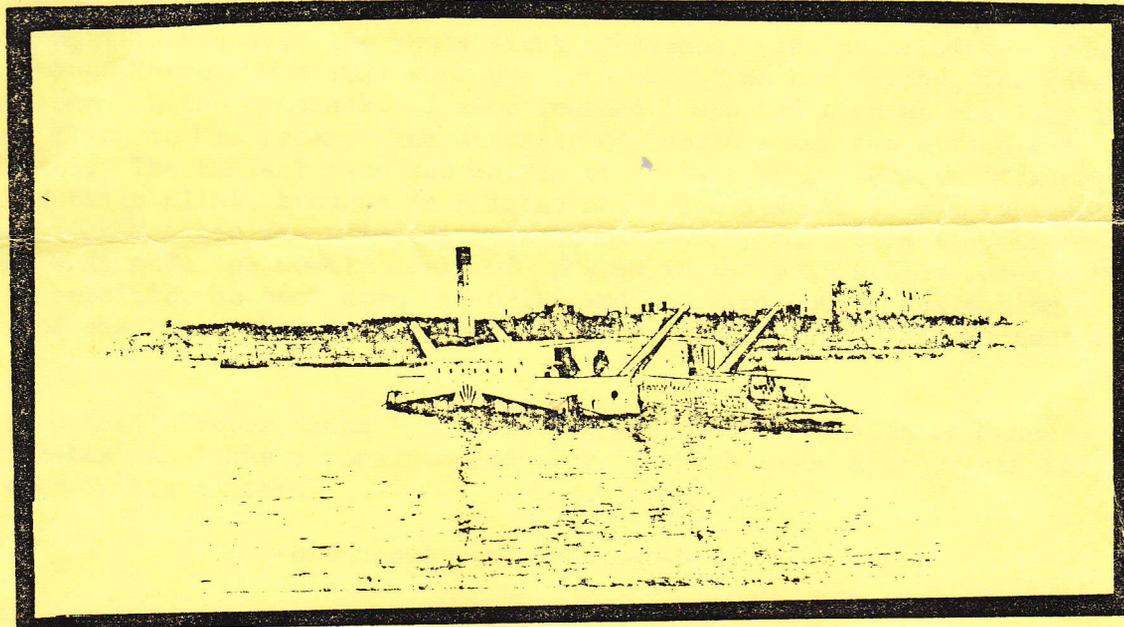
The first mention of a post office at Bawdsey is in the 1853 directory, with Edward Cooper as postmaster & shopkeeper. By 1864 it was Charles Benham; letters from Woodbridge 9.30 a.m. box closed at 4 p.m. in winter; 5 p.m. in

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manuscript is somewhat curious, not to say contentious.

It will be interesting to hear what our readers think.

summer. Charles Benham was still postmaster in 1873 but by 1879 it was T.M. Dosser, shopkeeper; nearest money order office at Alderton; telegraphs at Woodbridge. The 1885 directory gives the postmaster his full title :- Thomas Mahershalaahashbaz Dosser. The last mention of him is in 1892 when two telegraph and money order offices are named for use of Bawdsey; Alderton and Felixstowe Ferry, which is close to Bawdsey, the delivery charge was 10d. Reaching this office meant crossing the ferry which, until 1894 when the chain-ferry was in use, was a rowing boat. The chain-ferry was built by Sir W. Cuthbert Quilter, M.P., lord of the manor, whose house, now Air Ministry property, was erected on a fine bluff overlooking the ferry in 1886.



It was 1893 when Mrs Sarah Dosser was postmistress, she was also grocer and draper. The two money order offices are again listed, but telegraph delivery was reduced to 8d. Postal Orders were issued at Bawdsey, but not cashed. The postmistress did not carry the mail to Woodbridge as her husband had done, this duty was performed by her son who was also the local cobbler. Like his father, he too was a 'rum old boy'. His method for dealing with bad payers was unique. knowing the first thing a customer would do when collecting repaired boots, would be to turn them over to look at them, Mr. Drosser's charge for repairs was nailed in figures on the new soles. By 1925 the postmistress was Miss Millicent Dosser who appears to have served up to 1936.

George Booth's Almanack 1898 mentions Bawdsey Ferry Post Office, with James Green as postmaster. This office opened on the estate about the same time as the Manor House was built. It is doubtful that it was for the convenience of the many estate workers, but as M.P. Sir W. Cuthbert Quilter would have a large mail and an office near his home was an asset.

A recent Ordnance Survey map shows a footpath from Bawdsey village to the beach, a long tramp the beach revealed the footpath ending in steps down the cliff. Climbing the steps, feeling rather like old Mahershalaahashbaz's cat about to steal, and wondering if I too should finish end up at the bottom of the cliff

at high tide, I followed the path through some fir trees and there was Bawdsey Ferry Post Office. It was well kept with a neat garden of spring flowers. The letter box was disappointing, I had hoped for the VR but found the large GR built into the cottage. These types were installed when motor vans came in, the driver could empty the box from the outside without calling the postmaster. When there was a parcel or registered packet to collect a card was hung in the box to let the van driver know he had to call in the office.

Through the back door I entered the kitchen. Scales stood near a cigar box containing what looked like the whole stock of stamps. The postmistress told me she had been there since 1924 when she took over from her father, the James Green mentioned in the almanack. I also learned there had been an old lady in the office prior to Mr. Green. The majority of people using the office are RAF personnel. The busiest time was Battle of Britain Week, when an officer, obviously a philatelist, brought in a large number of special covers for posting. The kitchen table was piled up with them. It may have been the strong sea breeze that made the homely smell of cooking in the post office-cum-kitchen give me an appetite, so back down the cliff and homeward bound, collecting a large bag of shells on the way back to the ferry, what a lovely was to post a letter !

Footnote: Under ' Proper Names ' the Bible gives the translation of Maher - shalal-hash-baz as ' Haste spoil, speed prey ', which seems appropriate for a postmaster of his calibre.

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WRENTHAM

From: Christopher Crayon's Recollections:
the life and times of the late J.E. Ritchie as told by himself (1898)

p.35 (referring to Wrentham, Ritchie's native village, in 1820)

Our little village was situated on the high road between London and Great Yarmouth, along which rolled twice a day the London and Yarmouth Royal Mail, drawn by four horses, and driven by a fat man in red, whom we raw village lads regarded as a very superior person indeed. Behind sat the guard, also in red, with a horn, which he blew lustily when the occasion required. There was a time, but that was much later, when a day coach was put on, and, as it changed horses at our village inn, one of our chief delights was to see the tired, heated, smoking horses taken out, and their places filled by a new set, much given to kicking and plunging at starting, to the immense delight of the juvenile spectators. Even the passengers I regarded with awe. In fourteen hours would they not be in London where the King lived?

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WRENINGHAM DATE ERROR

I have for some years kept a postcard from this village, which bears an ED.VII stamp cancelled 10.30 a.m. AU 22, which has no year in the postmark. Recently an album of cards produced several of that period from Wreningham and another with the missing year, but this card is dated with the message from the sender as 22.8.07.

(from Mrs G. Driver)

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