

Talk 051219

December 5th - 'Early Postal Services in Pembrokeshire' - Rev. Roger Antell

Roger has been interested postage stamps since a boy and is currently Chairman of the Welsh Postal History Society. The talk covers the development of postal services in Pembrokeshire from its beginning in 1600, to 1850.

Good Queen Bess instituted the first mail service in 1600 to speed up communications between London and Southern Ireland where there was an uprising. Up to then, messages were being sent from London to Ireland via Chester. The route via Milford was quicker. At that time the mail service was for Government only. King Charles 1st established Government Postal Services from London to other key locations such as Edinburgh, Dover, Holyhead and Falmouth. When King Charles 2nd came to the throne, the postal services were put out to tender and were allowed to carry private citizens letters. All letters had to carry the 'bishop's mark' stamp, only available in London. A letter from Pembroke to London could take 10 days. Once stamped, it might have another long trip to Edinburgh say. Charges were paid by the recipient, not the sender. In the days before postal addresses finding the recipient could provide another challenge

One step forward in the process was the establishment of Receiving Houses, often inns or coffee shops, which collected mail and delivered it to the town Post Office. The post was carried by the Post Boy, who rode his horse carrying the postbag along his prescribed route. Mail Carriages took over the role late in the 18th century. The use of letter post also increased in the eighteenth century and more towns were allowed to open post offices. In 1840 the uniform penny post was introduced and there was an explosion in the number of letters carried. Luckily railways were being introduced and largely contained the postal need.

Roger also explained one puzzle. If you are driving from Carmarthen to Pembroke Dock along the A477, there are milestones which still direct you to Hobbs Point, not to Pembroke Dock. Hobbs Point, we were told, was the quay from which the Irish Mail Boat operated.