



DAWLISH LOCAL HISTORY GROUP

Newsletter

January 2009

Dear Members,

As I write, I am awaiting the arrival of my daughter with our three grandchildren who are staying with us over Christmas. The house is littered with wrapping paper and presents and every few moments my services are called upon to complete the decorations ... Well, you know how it is. My attention is elsewhere and doubtless errors will creep in to this newsletter for which I apologise.

Although this newsletter will reach you early in the new year please accept the best wishes of your committee both for the Christmas which has just passed and for the New Year which has just begun.

Some of you will have been interested in the early photographs of Dawlish shown to us by Todd Gray in his recent talk. You may even have tried to follow his suggestion that you find these and other images in the catalogue of the Library of Congress but without success. So I am grateful to Bob Vickery for advice on how to go about it:

Go to: www.loc.gov (The Library of Congress website.)

Select from the header menu: Digital Collections.

Select from the panel menus: Prints and photographs.

Hit the button: Search the catalogue.

In the Search Box type: Views of England / Dawlish

Click on : Preview images (and if necessary, scroll down to Dawlish.)

Good luck... it really is worth it..

Incidentally our next publication, "Stories of Dawlish Shore", is about to go to the printer and will be available to you shortly. We think it is one of our best books so it will be worth waiting for !

Bob Thompson

**Next Meeting : 2.30 p.m. on Monday
February 2nd. At the Manor House.**

**Angela Marks will give an illustrated
talk on:**

The Story of Dawlish

Before and After: Holcombe Post Office 1853-2008

In the year of 2008 the village Post Office was head-line news. In Holcombe, as in very many other villages, closure is unwelcome. At this time of change I have been interested to trace the pattern of postal deliveries and collections in the village where I spent long periods of my life.



When I was growing up at Sunnylands during the second world war, Mrs. Marlow was post-mistress, and the shop and Post Office were at Sorrento at the top of the village hill. Before this it had been further down the hill and opposite the church. My recollections are all of the second venue in the house built in the 1930s. The first Post Office was opened in 1907 by 17 year-old Mary Jarman (later Mrs Marlow) in the parlour of the end cottage on the hill – a post office and shop. Mrs. Marlow was a very large lady and quite formidable to me as a shy child. However, as I grew up I came to see her as a central figure in the life of the village. She always rang the church bell for Matins until it became too much for her, when we children in the choir shared the duty. Mrs. Marlow was followed by Peggy Sweetzer, her daughter, and the Shop and Post Office continued in the same place with subsequent owners Mrs. J. Price and then Fred Comber. More recently there has been a third move, and Geoff Oldacre adapted his bungalow in Holcombe Road behind the Castle Inn to accommodate the joint businesses. And in September 2008 the Post Office in Holcombe was closed, although the village shop lives on.

So, a beginning and an end within two generations. There is a most interesting story connected with postal deliveries to Holcombe village even before there was a Post Office. The papers which record this story have survived because they carry the signature of Anthony Trollope who had a distinguished career with the G.P.O. in the nineteenth century alongside his fame as a successful author. In the early 1850s there was a lively exchange of correspondence concerning the Dawlish letter-carrier who wrote to the Postmaster General on 18th May 1853:

“To the Right Honourable Viscount Canning, Postmaster General.

Your petitioner, Samuel Pepell, Letter Carrier under the Dawlish Post Office, most humbly begs to lay before your Lordship the daily engagements of his Town and country labours, feeling certain he has only to state

the arduous nature of those duties to gain your favourable consideration. In the first place, he begs to state that he attends the Post Office every morning at 4 a.m. 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 at the Office at 11 a.m. 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 1½ miles west of Dawlish, distributes the letters, returns to the Office in time to convey the bags to meet the 2 p.m. North Mail and then commences his second town delivery of the north and west letters. Fourthly he proceeds to a village called The Warren (and distributes the letters) about 2 miles east of Dawlish. Fifthly he attends at the office at 8 p.m. to convey the bags to meet the London Mail.

For the above duties he receives 14 shillings a week, viz, 7 shillings for his Town delivery, 5 shillings for attending the Mails, and 2 shillings 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 matter seems to have been passed to Anthony Trollope for his expertise, and there are detailed reports signed by him outlining his proposals for the distribution of mail both from Dawlish to Holcombe, Ashcombe and The Warren and also from Teignmouth to Shaldon, Ringmore, Combe-in-Teignhead, Stoke-in-Teignhead, Maidencombe, Bishopsteignton, Ashwell and Lyndridge Park. Anthony Trollope must have been given this duty to perform between his G.P.O. assignments to Ireland (1851-1853), and later to the West Indies and Egypt. He is also credited with inventing the pillar-box, and Holcombe still uses the wall letter-box erected in 1863 at Holcombe Villas.

A petition on behalf of the Dawlish letter-carrier was signed and endorsed by a personal letter from the Honourable and Reverend G.G.C. Talbot of Piermont House who wrote on 1st. April 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 me to be sadly overworked and underpaid. He is at work from 4 a.m. till 8 p.m., 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 shillings per week. We leave tomorrow for Witherington having been here for 2 months. Mrs. GGCT has much benefited by her stay, and I hope the cold weather will not be severe enough, at Witherington to hurt her now. Her Ladyship shall have her supply of lilies in due season,

Yours aff. G.G.C. Talbot.”

Despite this 'old-boy networking' on his behalf, the outcome was not all that Samuel Peppell may have wished. The Postmaster General eventually approved 'that the Dawlish letter-carrier may be relieved from the delivery at Holcombe, the letters for that place being so very few, and as his duties under the alteration will still be severe I do not recommend that any reduction should be made in his wages'

So no more money then - hard times indeed!

Pam Robins. With many thanks to John Darnell and to Maurice Criddle and the late Henry Morgan.

Yet Another Field Walk !

In mid-October eight members met at Shutterton Farm to walk a very large field which had been recently ploughed but was dry and the sun was shining. We spread out and slowly walked up the hill with eyes peeled looking forward to a very welcome cup of coffee and biscuits carried up in back packs by two of us. Then it was back down the field slowly, still collecting items which we thought of interest. At the bottom of the field we again sat under a well laden apple tree in the sunshine to examine our finds.

From the collection of pretty stones, and unusually shaped stones, nine interesting pieces were saved including a rim and part of a handle from the Frenchen and Westerwald towns in Germany and dating from the 16th and 18th centuries. A few worked black flints were also saved. Then when the walk was almost over, Bob won the prize (if there had been one which there wasn't !) when he found a large piece of the base of a jug dating from the 14th century.

Mavis Stuckey

Further Memories of Walter Varvel

Walter’s father, Ernest Varvel, was chauffeur to Mrs. Cavendish Bentinck in 1928. He drove a 25 horse-power Armstrong Siddeley which was used about once a month for her. He had one of the most embarrassing days of his life whilst employed by her. The car was ordered as the lady wished to visit How Hall, near Exmoor. It was a foggy November day and about mid-day Ernest had to deliver a parcel to the Strand Post Office before setting out on the journey. Leaving the lady in the car he rushed out to post it, took his time in the queue then jumped back into the car, seeing a fur coat through the misty window, proceeded to Exmoor, reached the Hall, went up the steps to announce their arrival, opened the door only to find that Mrs Cavendish Bentinck was not there, only her fur coat.

It transpired that she had got out of the car at the Dawlish Post Office and walked to Boon’s, the paper shop. She had no opportunity to get back in the car before it had been driven off and she had to get a taxi to return home. There was quite a ‘bit of fur flying’ when Mr. Varvel got back !

Mr Michael Bowes Lyon, one of Mrs Cavendish Bentinck’s nephews, teased Mr Varvel about it later. It had been Michael who had got Ernest the job in Dawlish and also the car. Ernest had previously worked for 24 years with one family whose grand-daughter had married Michael Bowes Lyon. During Ernest’s driving career he drove the Queen Mother and also the Prince of Wales (who was later to abdicate the throne).

Betty Roberts

Climate Change

Will anyone interested in researching climate change in Devon please contact me on 866190.

Bob Thompson