

## SOME OLD RECOLLECTIONS OF THE TODDINGTON POST OFFICE

( From Leighton Buzzard Observer, August 1894 )

I have read with regret in the columns of a contemporary of today the announcement that my late respected kinsman ( Mr. W. Horley, postman between Toddington and Dunstable ) has gone over to the great majority. Certainly it was with years full of service in the above capacity, although his own course had fallen short of the usually allotted threescore and ten. His departure has called to mind much in connection with early times in the Post Office at Toddington, etc; also that about ten days previously I had occasion to visit that neighbourhood, when, on my return journey, we travelled Dunstable-ward together, yet little did either of us then think of receiving so quick and certain a call from the Universal Leveller. With him is severed the last link in connection with the establishment of the Post Office - or, to be quite correct, as the authorities at St. Martin's Le Grand chose to name it, 'Receiving Office' at Toddington, in the year 1846. He commenced to deliver some of the very first letters to arrive, and he has continued in connection with that office, one monotonous travel nearly the whole of that time. May he find the needed rest at last. For the minute I forgot the name of the postman who used to bring the letters from Dunstable previous to that time, but I can recollect his portraiture as well as if he were present now, and can see him pull up at the front of the house, lean over the side of his horse and draw his stick along the palisading to attract our notice. The receipt of a letter then to many was a thing of consequence, for 4d, 6d, and 8d was sometimes payable on the letters brought; this and the irregularity of receipt, and the great inconvenience in the despatch of the letters, etc., caused the inhabitants to consider the propriety of applying for a Post Office for the town. Accordingly, a public meeting was held, the outcome of which was to send a written notice to all principal inhabitants requesting them to take an account of the exact number of all letters received and despatched by them during a certain week. Replies were considered satisfactory, and application was then made to the Postmaster General. I must say that these efforts were mainly due to the late Wm. D. C. Cooper, Esq., father of Major Cooper, the present worthy Squire of the Manor of Toddington. I need hardly say that the result was satisfactory, and my late father was installed in the office, at the magnificent salary of £4 per annum, and, when it is considered that he was only able to make six yearly contracts, ranging from 15s to 30s, with the principal recipients of letters for the outlying districts of Harlington, Sundon, Chalton, Chalgrave, Wingfield and Tebworth, it must, I think, be conceded that a fortune was not very easily to be made from the Post Office in those days. There were three contracting parties at Harlington, two at Lower Sundon, and Mr. Wm Foll of Chalgrave Manor, made up the total of six. Harlington, beside the contractors, would not receive more than three letters daily upon an average, Sundon probably the same ( not more ), Chalton less than that number per week., whilst Wingfield and Tebworth combined would be about three per week between them. The charge for delivering a letter then at Wingfield was threepence, but at all other places named it was twopence; but I have no doubt a free delivery is the boon of them all now, and, what is now another desideratum, a collection at regular hours in the place; and when it is considered the visits to Wingfield and Tebworth were only made when a letter had to be delivered, that for purposes of collection was useless; in fact I never recollect bringing back a letter from these places in my life, although I have delivered many, and to post a letter they had either to walk to Toddington, Hockcliffe, or waylay the postman on the Dunstable Road, which was far from pleasant on dark winters nights, though common enough. Then near the top of Lord's Hill it may interest some, perhaps, to know that Houghton Regis had its receiving office established the same morning, and the evening previous I went with my father to interview the soon to be proprietor of the same, the much respected schoolmaster of the village, Mr. Cumberland. I will also mention a very undesirable duty connected with the post office at Toddington at that time, which has caused my mother to remark more than once upon the bad pay in the post office in those days. We were not only obliged to sell stamps, but compelled never to let the stock be under stated value, yet the pay for the use of the requisite capital, to say nothing of the occasional loss, and to be making sales all the day through, was for several years recompensed with nothing per annum; and, after my mother's determination not to continue her labours any longer on such terms, my father, being unable to undertake these duties altogether, wrote to the General Post Office, and learnt that his profit should have been 1 per cent., but, although it was secured for the future, the past was lost. I purpose now to give a few particulars of the number of letters passing through the office at that time, but as I know nothing of the present times I cannot make a comparison, but I have my father's figures for a portion of 1847- 48. Mondays were days when the least numbers came in, partly on account of there being no London mail until Tuesday morning. Fancy that ! A letter posted after six at night at the General Post Office on Saturday not reaching Toddington until Tuesday ! But so it was. Well, on Monday, Dec 27th, there were ten arrived at Toddington and all the district. Someone might be inclined to ask - Does that include Christmas cards ? Oh no ! for the simple reason, I think, that there were none then, and the highest number for a Monday I can quote was January 3rd 1848, when it totalled eighteen, and the highest number for any one day was January 6th same year, when it reached sixty-three. The numbers despatched ( except Mondays ) were always less than the receipts, and ranged from seventeen up to forty-nine, and an average would be less than thirty-five. The greatest satisfaction I know in connection with the post office at Toddington is that after twenty one years service, which the authorities thought right to conclude, the inhabitants, who were the better judges of my father's service, generously presented him with a framed testimonial ( which I still hold with pride ), as an expression of their satisfaction of his management, and also a more tangible proof in the shape of a purse and contents. I cannot conclude this without an expression of regret that my respected kinsman, after so many long years of service, failed to reap the advantage of a well earned pension, and which seemed almost within reach of his hand.

Luton, Aug. 23rd, 1894

Wm. Horley

### A POSTMAN'S DECEASE

A well known local postman died last Friday week after a short illness. William Horley, whose age was 64, entered the Post Office service in 1848, having thus been 46 years in the service, performing his duties up to within a few days of his death. In the early part of his life he was carrier from Dunstable to Toddington, delivering letters at Houghton Regis and Toddington, and in later years he drove from Dunstable to Toddington twice a day. Deceased who had a high character with his employers, was a member of the Congregational Church, Edward street. The funeral took place in the cemetery on Tuesday, and was conducted by the Rev. C. A. Eastwood. Among the large number of sympathisers present were Mr. Scroggs ( post master ), Mr. Baker ( sub post master, Toddington ), Mr. Bennett ( post office clerk ), the Dunstable town postmen, with one exception; Mr. Osborn ( Houghton Regis ), Mr. Cheshire ( Markyate ), Mr. Smith ( ex post man of Kensworth ). Deceased leaves a widow and one son.

Our correspondent, Mr. William Horley, of Luton, gives our readers this week some interesting particulars of the infant days of Toddington Post Office. On Monday Dec. 27th, there were ten letters received for Toddington and district, which beside the town of Toddington, included the outlying parishes and hamlets of Harlington, Sundon, Chalton, Chalgrave, Wingfield, and Tebworth. Probably, at the present time, a good many residents receive some mornings at least that number of letters! The highest in any one day of the year following was sixty-three, on January 6th - Christmas bills, doubtless. It is by such figures as Mr. Horley gives that one can form some idea of the immense value of our postal system. There is, however, another side of the subject. In the present day of post cards and memorandum forms, letter writing has become to a large extent a lost art. Where do we now find literary men who take the trouble to write

such letters as Sir Walter Scott, the poet Cowper, or Charles Lamb were in the habit of delighting their friends with; in a lesser degree the art of writing a letter worth reading was practised by persons of greater obscurity. Now, the style of correspondence resembles that of the ingenious youth who wrote to his uncle - "Dear uncle, ready for the needful" The latter replied "Dear nephew, the needful not ready."

### PRESENTATION TO LATE POST- MASTER

It will be in the recollection of our readers, that a few months ago the Post-Office, which has been in the hands of Mr. William Horley for the last 21 years was suddenly transferred to another locality, under the supervision of a gentleman from head office. A suggestion was made in the columns of this paper that some recognition of these long and valuable services of the late post master should be manifested by the presentation of a suitable testimonial on behalf of the inhabitants. This suggestion met with the hearty approval of all parties, and the necessary steps were promptly taken. On Friday evening last, the friends and admirers of Mr. Horley invited him to a dinner, which was prepared in excellent style by Mrs. Shepherd, of the Griffin. The chair was taken by Mr. Green, of the Park Farm; the vice-chair being occupied by Mr. Bradshaw. There were present, among others, Messrs, Arnold, D. Dunham, W. Horley, E. Horley, E. Sear, G. Ashby, F. Clark, T. Bradshaw, A. Horley, H. Potts, Tilney, Withington, &c.

After the usual toasts had been duly honoured the chairman introduced the business of the meeting. He referred in the very highest terms to the esteem in which Mr. Horley was held throughout the parish; enumerated the various services which Mr. Horley and family, had cheerfully rendered to all parties, often at considerable personal inconvenience, and, without any remuneration whatever. Messrs. Potts, Tilney, and Ashby spoke in a somewhat similar strain.

The chairman then presented, on behalf of the numerous contributors, comprising persons representing all classes in the parish, a very handsome testimonial, consisting of a purse containing £16 16s. and a memorial engrossed upon parchment and framed. The memorial read as follows :- " Presented to Mr. William Horley, by the inhabitants of Toddington and its vicinity with a purse containing sixteen guinees; in recognition of the kind and considerate manner in which he has for twenty- one years discharged the duties of postmaster, - Signed, John Green, David Bradshaw, churchwardens."

Mr. Horley, who was deeply affected by the expressions of esteem and good will, in which the chairman and others had indulged, briefly and feelingly replied. He was conscious of having striven to do his duty; and especially to do so, as kindly and helpfully to his neighbours as possible. He was always glad to be able to oblige anyone, as far as lay within his power to do so. He should prize this memorial as a token of the good will and esteem of his fellow townsmen, and was sure his children would put great store by it also. He most heartily thanked them.

The purse, which was a very beautiful and elaborate work of art, was made by the Misses Atkins, of the Grange, to whom the hearty thanks of the company were most enthusiastically accorded.

After the business of the evening was over, the company spent the remainder of the evening in a friendly conversation upon parish and other matters. We cannot let this very pleasing occasion pass without adding that many of those most indebted to Mr. Horley and his family are in the ranks of those who could not figure either as contributors to the testimonial or as visitors at the Griffin, but who nevertheless deeply feel the value of service rendered to them, from whom no return could ever be expected. The poor have found in Mr. Horley a kind friend, a willing helper, and a wise and faithful councillor. We sincerely hope that Mr. Judge may have the happiness to perform the new duties of his office with equal satisfaction to himself and his neighbours.