

From that time until now includes a growth in the British postal service as wonderful as the development of the most gigantic oak from its tiny seed—a marvel of modern civilization, unsurpassed in its vastness, variety and utility.

Without stopping to note a number of the earliest stages of progress, the first Government Letter Post was established in the reign of James I. In the subsequent reign of Charles I. the postal rates were fixed at twopence a single letter for any distance under eighty miles; fourpence up to one hundred and forty miles; sixpence for any longer distance in England; while to any place in Scotland, the charge was eightpence.

In 1641, the existing Postmaster, Thomas Withering, was superseded by Philip Burlamachy, the first one placed under the superintendence of the principal Secretary of State. Many important changes were introduced in Cromwell's time, which at the Restoration were confirmed by Act of Parliament, which was the first strictly legal authority for the establishment of a post-office, and in consequence is known as its charter.

In 1683, a London upholsterer—Robert Murray—started a penny post for the city. It subsequently fell into the hands of William Dockwra. It was remarkable for its extraordinary liberality and extraordinary success, and still more for the fact that it anticipated by more than one hundred and fifty years many of the reforms of Sir Rowland Hill, the greatest of all post-office reformers Great Britain has ever known.

Like every other reform in the postal service, Dockwra's London Penny Post had to encounter much opposition. It was denounced by the ultra-Protestants as a contrivance of the Jesuits, and that "if the bags were examined they would be found full of Popish plots."

The whole postal establishment of the country was remodelled in the reign of Queen Anne, 1710, and this Act remained as the foundation of the British postal law up to 1837.

The next stage of postal development took place nine years after the passing of the Act of Queen Anne, and was due to Ralph Allen—a highly honourable name in philanthropy as well as in postal history. He is Pope's "humble Allen," and also Fielding's "Squire Allworthy" in "Tom Jones." Allen was the inventor of what was known as the "cross-roads postal system." Allen was Deputy Postmaster of Bath, and in his official capacity had many opportunities of observing how extremely few and ill-supplied the cross posts were throughout the country. Many districts were entirely without postal service, and in other cases letters passing between neighbouring towns were carried by circuitous routes, causing serious delay in those days of slow locomotion. Allen's proposed reorganization and extension of these cross-posts so strongly recommended itself to the Government that he was granted a life-lease at an annual rental of £6,000. His success was so great that for forty-four years he enjoyed an annual profit of some £12,000, which he generously spent in charity and hospitality to men of learning and genius.

It was reserved for another Bath gentleman—John Palmer, manager of the theatre in that town, to effect in 1784 a far greater improvement, officially described as "One of the greatest reforms ever made in the post-office"—the mail coach service. To quote the account which Palmer gave of the existing system, in the scheme he submitted to Mr. Pitt:

"The post," he states, "at present, instead of being the swiftest, is almost the slowest conveyance in the country; and although from the great improve-