

A DRIVER and WEATHERHEAD family history

Silsden, West Yorkshire, England

Tracing the story of two Silsden families, through six generations of change

Written and compiled by Ian Stimson and Kate Mawer

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Appendix 6

Letter from Charles Driver (Q3) December 1873

Charles, age 13, wrote a Christmas letter to his parents William and Sarah. Charles was at Airedale Academy. The back of the letter is addressed to

Mr Driver
Silsden

Academy,

Hon^d Parents,

Airedale

Dec^r 24th 1873,

Actuated by a desire to perform what I consider to be a duty, I address to you my Christmas letter.

My motto being "Onward," I have made it my earnest endeavour by diligent perseverance in a great variety of studies, namely Reading, Writing, Orthography, English Grammar, Geography, Arithmetic both mental and practical, Natural Philosophy, History, and other important branches of a good education to secure rapid and sound improvement.

I hope that my success in this object will secure your entire satisfaction and reward me in time to come.

You might justly charge me with ingratitude were I to omit this fitting occasion for returning my sincere thanks for all your favours, and I trust that my future conduct will never cause you to think those favours badly bestowed.

Wishing you the compliments of the season with every earthly blessing,

I am hon^d Parents,

Your dutiful Son,

Charles Driver.

P.S. Mr Bradley's respectful compliments to you.

Andale Academy.

Dec: 24th 1873.

Hon^{ble} Parents

Influenced by a desire
to perform what I consider a duty, I address
to you my Christmas letter.

My motto being "Forward," I have
made it my earnest endeavour by diligent
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vours and I trust that my future conduct will
never cause you to think these favours badly
bestowed.

Wishing you the compliments
of the season with every earthly blessing.

I am, Hon^{ble} Parents,

Your dutiful son,

Charles D. Dyer

P.S. Mr. Bradley's respectful compliments
to you.

Appendix 7

The Post Office in Silsden

The history of Silsden's Post Office became an appendix to this family history because John Driver, P4+, was found to have been in charge of the Silsden Post Office for a few years and he was then followed by his father, Thomas Driver, P4, who held the position of Postmaster for about twenty years, actually Sub-Postmaster, and John's sister, Hannah, worked at the Silsden Post Office as telegraphic clerk for perhaps fourteen years.

Silsden's post office does not have a defined start date as the postal system grew from the times when the King's mail arrangements were allowed to be used by courtiers and then by an even wider range of aristocracy. In 1635 it was opened by Charles 1 for use by the public and the General Post Office (GPO) was established by King Charles II in 1660. In 1969 the Post Office changed from being a state monopoly to being a publicly owned company.

The postal system made use of a number of roads radiating from London with horses and riders standing by at regular intervals on these post roads. These routes were largely those created by the Romans and in recent times identified as A1, 2, 3, 4 and 5. Because of cost only the Great North Road and the Dover Road were fully functioning. Initially all mail would travel via and be sorted in London until cross post routes were established.

In many cases charges were paid by the receiver, based upon the distance a letter had travelled to its destination. However, one description in 1583, significantly prior to it being officially opened for use by the public, reads 'Post boys were required to carry and use a horn to advertise their presence for the benefit of local people, the uncommissioned users. Charges were now one and a half pence per ridden mile for commissioned post and two pence for uncommissioned post'.

Then a later item from the Keighley Directory of 1830 tells us a little more. 'POST-OFFICE, at the Black Horse, 5, Low Street, Mrs. Martha Cook, Post-

Mistress. A Horse Post from Bradford, conveying Letters to and from all parts'. Then again from a trade directory, times were published showing times of arrival and despatch, some times being the post to the north and different times for post to the south. Charges for home and abroad were also shown with some payable in advance and other charges on receipt.

In 1839 and 1840 the Great Office Reform Act was approved by parliament and a flat four pence fee was introduced for inland letters of up to half an ounce irrespective of distance travelled. In 1840 this was reduced to one penny. The scene was now set for an adhesive label to be used to show that payment had been made by the sender and the Penny Black and 'Tuppenny' Blue stamps were launched in May 1840. These fees were for letters within the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland.

With the introduction of the penny post and increasing literacy of the population the number of letters being handled by the Post Office will have rapidly increased. The informal nature of delivery and collection changed to a full-time occupation which was recognised as a necessity in this portion of the Aire Valley in 1847. Appointments of postman and of postmaster for Silsden were recorded in the Post Office minutes.

The Post Office archives are accessible at the Postal Museum Discovery Room, near Mount Pleasant in London. The Discovery Room has microfilm indexes of the Postmaster General Minute Books. The minute books have many hundreds of minutes in each book and not all of the index entries have a visible minute number because of the manner in which the books have been bound. One minute that might have been interesting had a note to say that it was in the vaults, not accessible without a very good reason!



The vast quantity of minutes of the Postmaster General show a strange mixture of topics ranging from punishment for a messenger being intoxicated and a washerwoman's extra pay for cleaning an additional office, through to matters applying to overseas mail and to transport of mail by train; from repairing a weighing machine to removal of wires from a premises.

Not surprisingly the individual minutes are frequently cryptic and not as explicit as one would have wished. Only 16 records were found relating to Silsden over the period 1860 to 1896. It was unusual for a person to be named in the minutes. In an Appointment Book and Minute Book there are three references to Silsden: -

1847 John Sutcliffe entry in Appointment Book 'Keighley Near Leeds to Silsden'.

1847 John Berry entry in Appointment Book 'Silsden: Leeds'.

1847 Jun Leeds Minute 692. Surveyors Dept advised John Berry appointed Silsden 22 Jun 1847.

John Sutcliffe was a Yorkshireman who lived in North Street, Keighley and, in 1841, was described as a pot dealer. In 1851, now at Market Place, Keighley, as a postman and china dealer, age 49. As will be shown shortly, he was the postman who daily delivered mail to and collected from further up the Aire valley, which included Steeton and Silsden. It is believed he died in 1861.

With letters being delivered and collected by the postman from Keighley there was little need for a post office in Silsden. There were occasional letters to weigh and sale of stamps, but even now much of the population would not be able to write or read. However, this was changing and the amount of business was increasing.

It is quite likely that there was no post office or postmaster in Silsden before 1847. John Berry was born and bred in Silsden. In 1841 census he was a grocer living in the area of Silsden's Back Lane. In 1851 he was 60 and

a farmer of 10 acres and postmaster, living in the area of Bell Square with wife Mary, two unmarried daughters who were school mistresses and a grandson. In the 1861 census John Berry, age 70, was shown only as Postmaster. His wife had died but he still had his two daughters, school mistresses, living with him at 'Rd Silsden' which is the Bridge Street area. They could well have occupied the same house for the previous thirty years. John Berry died in 1864.

Bearing in mind that it is said that John Sutcliffe had an embryonic post office in Silsden's Bridge Street, it is thought probable that this was John Berry's house and grocer shop and John Sutcliffe had perhaps arranged with John Berry for the latter to sell stamps which were needed after May 1840. The two Johns were not officially appointed until 1847. There are several instances where it appears something was happening in the postal arrangements before they were officially minuted.

A more detailed account of the mail process appeared in a letter written by a school master in Silsden in March 1861 which says 'I shall listen, after a few days, for Old Sutcliffe's horn, and shall open most anxiously your letter. I may say that Sutcliffe is our postman. He brings the letters from Keighley in a "gig", blows his horn: we go to the door and receive our letters from him as he passes up the street. After half an hour we hear his horn again: we give him - as I shall do this - any letters we have to send, and he takes them to the Keighley Post-office.'

From Steeton another description says "Old Sutcliffe' came from Keighley with the letters. He came in the morning, went further up the valley, and returned through Steeton at 5 p.m. Letters were put on the window sashes for him. He was dressed in a red coat, came limping along tooting occasionally with his brass horn.' This supports the thought that Sutcliffe would logically have been a resident of Keighley.

There are two more notes made from the minute books which may relate to John Sutcliffe:-

1853 Apr Recommended Keighley & Silsden Messenger's weekly salary be raised from 10/- to 11/-.

1856 Oct Keighley & Silsden Messenger pay suspended and cautioned re offence of intoxication.

Note 1. The use of the word messenger may be a carry-over from the telegraph delivery days when he was carrying only messages.

Note 2. He was punished with suspension from pay for two days and cautioned that, for the next offence, he would be dismissed.

These have told us how the post office business operated in outlying regions, but in London and big towns and cities letterboxes had been introduced in 1853, but in 1861 were not yet rolled out in Silsden.

The photograph is of a Victorian letterbox inset into a garden wall that is still in use in 2022.

Although John Berry died in 1864 no Post Office appointment of a new postmaster was found until 1899. However, other sources tell us that John Driver was Silsden's next postmaster and that a few years later his father Thomas took the position. Thomas Driver was the younger brother of William Driver, the nailmaker, and an established Silsden family and not from Leeds as erroneously stated in the 1891 census. After Thomas' death in 1892 there appears a similar gap before the following postmaster was officially appointed.



The years 1864 through to 1912 formed a remarkable period of expansion of the Post Office business, not just in volume but of new types of business. Firstly the Money Order business (October 1864) was followed by the Post Office Savings Bank (July 1865), the Telegraph (1870), the Postal Order (1881) and then the GPO Telephone Systems (January 1912). This data comes from Ken Smith's online analysis of West Yorkshire Post Offices. This is also where one becomes aware of the scale of the GPO business, both in duration and breadth of activities. The dates given above are the dates when the system was installed at Silsden's Post Office, although the NTC telephone system had been in operation in Silsden from about 1893.

The Money Order and Postal Order systems provided means of transferring a sum of money to someone who was not living locally. The Post Office Savings Bank was aimed at providing a savings account for someone who did not have a bank account. It became so popular that within five years there were 600,000 savings accounts and by 1927 a quarter of the population had Post Office Savings Bank accounts. It was so popular because it provided a savings service at a time when banks were not providing any service for the poor.

The telegraph was an electrical messaging system that would replace the visual based systems that were in common use across the developed world. The first commercial use of the electric telegraph system was in London in 1838 and its growth was rapid with constant improvements. This was primarily in conjunction with railway companies who, in the years 1840-1843, standardised their timetables according to London time. This became known as railway time and it was progressively adopted in the following years, but not formally adopted until an Act of Parliament in 1880. In 1846 the world's first public telegraph company had been set up in London. It was the Electric Telegraph Company (ETC) which arranged exclusive access to install telegraph cables along railway lines on what were then called telegraph poles. The term telegraph poles persisted and has been retained almost throughout the telephone period until overhead

lines were largely replaced by underground cables, fibre optics or were wireless.

The ETC made a practice of buying up patents thus limiting competition. Their main customers were the railway companies and the use was largely associated with signalling. None the less, in 1851 the Magnetic Telegraph Company with different technology was set up and became the main competitor with cables along highways. In 1870 the telegraph companies were nationalised and became part of the General Post Office (GPO) monopoly.

It was in 1870 that the Post Office records show a public telegraph system in the post office in Silsden. This is the date quoted in the Ken Smith analysis. It had the 3-letter unique code, SJV. Whether there had been a local telegraph arrangement prior to this is unknown but, being a village, it seems unlikely that there would have been enough business to support it. However, the date of the service being available through the post office in Silsden is the same year as existing systems were nationalised, so this could indicate that the post office took over a system that was already in place. No reference to the Silsden Post Office or Telegraph Office has been found in the 1871 census.



The electrical telegraph system came into use in the 1840s and by 1849 one hundred and fifty towns in the UK had been connected. The system was used in the Crimean War (1853-1856). In Britain development of telegraph messaging had been left to private enterprise and had led to a profusion of companies each claiming some protection by patents and wayleaves. As early as 1854 the results were being criticised for preventing a joined up highly important system for national and international business and for government use. In 1867 the first of a series of Acts enabled the Post Office to compete in the telegraph business on the same commercial basis as the existing companies, and this was followed by the creation of a monopoly, in 1870.

The growth of the telegraph system is illustrated by the increase in employment and telegraph system job titles. In the census of the Silsden area in 1861 there were 12 telegraph job titles and this had increased to 38 such titles in 1871.

One of the earlier tasks when the telegraph system became part of the GPO was to connect each post office to the local telegraph system. The Silsden Post Office now had the responsibility of delivering telegraph messages. This could have played a part in the post office's decision for local mail to be delivered from Silsden Post Office rather than from Keighley. So this change in delivery could have been in or around 1870.

However, GPO minutes show letters for Silsden in 1847 were routed from Leeds, 1855 from Keighley, 1859 from Leeds and in 1889 from Keighley. This agrees with trade directories for Silsden which state in both 1881 and 1884 that letters arrived at Silsden from Leeds. The 1881 and 1884 trade directories show that letters were delivered to Silsden Post Office at 7am and at 5.50pm and were despatched from Silsden at 10.40am and 6.25pm (5.25pm on Sundays). It also tells us that Thomas opened the post office at 8am until 8pm six days a week and from 8am until 10am on Sundays.

It is believed that the minutes are stating where the sorting took place. Bags for Silsden may well have been conveyed in the same transport as

those delivered to Keighley. When Silsden Post Office actually became responsible for the distribution in the town is unclear.

It was mid 1870s when the emerging telephone system started to be used commercially in London, by which time numerous new telephone companies were in operation. In 1880 telephones came under the Post Office monopoly and preparations were made for unification of the many systems. In 1881 by amalgamation, the National Telephone Company (NTC) was formed and a strong effort was made to unify the systems. In Silsden the NTC continued to operate until nationalised at the end of 1911.

It is important to remember that the telephone system was additional to the telegraph system with both systems continuing to have technical improvements. The important difference being that the telegraph system provided a paper record and therefore was useful to businesses.

The railway from Keighley to Skipton passed between the villages of Steeton and Silsden, and was nearer to Steeton. For the telegraph the exchange would have been either in a room at the station or in a nearby house, perhaps in Steeton, and the exchange was given the name of Steeton. No list of subscribers has been found. Such a list was probably considered unnecessary as during sending and transmission the post office's code was all that was required. The local post office knowing its subscribers had the responsibility of delivering the messages. They would also be responsible for despatching any messages on behalf of subscribers.

For the telephone, with very many potential subscribers, that process would not suffice. A large exchange with several operators would have been needed and this was installed at Steeton in or before October 1893. All the telephone numbers for the widespread community in many nearby villages, including Silsden, were therefore 'Steeton' followed by a number.

The earliest 'NTC Yorkshire List of (*telephone*) Subscribers' found is 1888 Issue 5. Under the Bradford heading the Steeton exchange is listed. It had 25 subscribers and this small number suggests the original telegraph facility may have been modified and expanded. Equally, does the Issue 5

indicate that Bradford had had a telephone service four years earlier? It was too early to find any mention of Driver or Weatherhead businesses.

Earlier we mentioned the appointment of John Berry in 1847 who lived in Bridge Street. This is considered to be the first location of a post office in Silsden, P1 on the map on page 217 and not precisely identified. He died in 1864 and there seems to be a small gap before the next known postmaster took over. It may be that one of his daughters stood in until someone was appointed. His eldest daughter, Grace, a school mistress, unmarried, age 48 and his second daughter Jane, also a school mistress, widowed, age 39 and with her own 5-year-old, may have continued keeping the Post Office going for a while. It may be that a teenage John Driver was helping the Berry sisters. This is at the start of the expansion of the Post Office business.

John Driver was the next person reported to be the postmaster and he probably took that position in about 1866, when he was 20, and held it for two or three years before his father, Thomas Driver, became postmaster.

Thomas was therefore in charge during the majority of the above mentioned business expansions. He was assisted by his daughter, Hannah, who became the telegraphist. The 1861 census shows the Thomas Driver family, including unmarried John age 14, to be in St John's Square. The 1871 census shows Thomas, still a nail maker, to be in Kirkgate at what would become number 54, and Silsden's Post Office, P2 on the map below. It also showed son John, now a railway porter, living in New Road Side (Bolton Road). John had married Elizabeth Mitchell in 1870 in Skipton. Exactly when the Driver family moved into Kirkgate is unclear but it may



have been about 1864, the year John Berry died. In the 1881 census we see Thomas, as the postmaster and also a 'CS Offr', that is a civil servant. His 18-year-old daughter was a telegraph clerk.

It is worth noting in 1884 there were two deliveries to and collections from Silsden Post Office each weekday. The post office was open seven days a week, indicating the increased volume of letters that were being handled and that deliveries to recipients were now done from Silsden's Post Office.

Costs and a multitude of contractual arrangements with national and multi-national companies, plus the introduction of the telephone system and licences that allowed existing telephone companies to continue to function, meant that nationalisation was not completed until the first day of January 1912. By that time the national network had been largely unified and in place in time for the impending war.

For telephone calls the connections were made at the exchanges, so the post office was not involved, but they did have a telephone at the post office for public use, and Silsden first had such a phone in 1896. This initially would have been in the post office but subsequently, in 1914, a telephone box was outside the office and therefore available at all hours.

It is interesting to read that for telegraphs the sender, having provided the name of the exchange of the intended receiver, had to provide the name and type of business. When the telephone system first started the caller provided the name of the exchange, name and address of the person being called and the operator would look up the number and connect accordingly. This immediately overloaded the telephone operator and the task was transferred to the caller, who now had to state the number.

The first Silsden Driver record of being a telephone subscriber was in the 1899-1900 directory, page 834, when Henry and Frank Driver had their business at Airedale Shed. The William Driver business was a user of the telegraph system and later had telephone number 41 and number 42

834 When Calling give Name of Exchange as well as Number.

NAME OF EXCHANGE.	BRADFORD.
Bradford ...	1450 DRAOUP P. & Co., Jacquard Machine Makers...32, Richmond road.
Bradford ...	1510 DRACUP SamuelLane close mills.
Bradford ...	253 DRAOUP & NowellPatent Agents...2, Market street.
Thornton ...	29 DRAKE Jno.Winterbank, Queensbury.
Bradford ...	1811 DRAKE & HayStuff, Woollen Merchants...60, Leeds road,
Steeeton ...	42 DRIVER Bros.Airedale shed, Silsden.
Bradford ...	1012 DRIVER EdmundWholesale Grocer...17, Westgate.
Bradford ...	182 DRUMMOND James & Sons Ltd.Lumb lane mills.

continued to be Driver Brothers number after they moved to North Street Mills.

Thomas Driver with his daughter, Hannah Elizabeth, experienced most of the changes mentioned above, but no mention has been found regarding his wife Jane. They were married in 1844, so when Thomas took on this employment in about 1870 the youngest of their six children was age 7, and the eldest John, who had been postmaster for a few relatively quiet years, was 23 and was getting married that year. One can readily see this being run as if it were a family business with the family living 'over the shop' in Kirkgate and lending a hand when needed. Hannah Elizabeth was married in 1891 and Thomas died early in January 1892.

William Moore became the next postmaster and continued in that position for 32 years. He had to set about finding new premises for that business. It appears that for a few years it was in Wesley Place, P3 on the map below, then for a similar period to have been in St John Street, at P4, the building in the centre of the photo, the



second of the front doors counting from the left, with the post office nameplate over the door.

In December 1899 William Moore was officially appointed as Silsden's Sub-Postmaster and Walter Mitchell as Postman in Silsden.



This was followed by seven years in a larger building on the west side of Kirkgate known as Post Office Building, 65-67 Kirkgate, P5. This more recent photo shows the old Horne

farmhouse with a ground floor extension to the building line of the Town Hall. The Post Office occupied the left hand of the two shops, number 65.

In 1899 William Moore was listed as having full voting rights living at 65 Kirkgate and also of 60 St John Street, the earlier Post Office. In the 1901 census, living at 65 Kirkgate, he described his occupation as postmaster, worker, at home. While in 1911 he was shown as 'worker (*employee*) of the post office'.

From September 1907 until 2017 the Post Office was on the east side at number 66 adjacent to the footbridge, P6. This Post Office, the one with the red letterbox and telephone box, together with the adjacent shop had been rebuilt. The building was

generally known as The Earl of Thanet Lodge and seems to have served as the Lodge for both the Oddfellows and the Foresters as well as housing the Post Office.



In the period 2010 to 2020, with the rapid expansion of online communications and mobile phones, the postal income was in rapid decline. Improvements in handling letters and parcels were made, but with increased competition of parcel delivery meant The Post Office had to readjust. Consequently, Silsden's Post Office closed in 2017, with postal services being provided at the newsagents, Twiggs, P7, also in Kirkgate.

William Moore's appointment as postmaster was minuted in 1899. William Moore is reported to have retired in 1924 and to have been succeeded by his assistant Emily Wilkinson. Indeed, her name appears as being Sub-Postmistress in the 1927 Kelly's Directory.

In 1969 the postal and telecommunications businesses were separated and the histories of telegraph and telephone systems are now part of the BT archives at Holborn in London.

Finally, and to close this appendix, three reminiscences illustrating relatively recent changes in the telephone system. The first, from the late 1950s and manual exchanges, was that when living in Hertfordshire, when my wife was visiting her parents in Silsden, I returned home one evening and, on picking up the telephone to make a call, the operator told me that there had been a call for me earlier that evening from Yorkshire.



The second, a call to Silsden from a remote village in France where we were on holiday. On explaining to the lady in the village post office what we wanted, we 'made her day'. She had to book the call and, after perhaps a quarter of an hour's wait, we had the call. We wondered whether she had ever previously had to arrange a call to Britain.

The third in the 1970s was a business call from England to California. Transatlantic calls were voice-actuated, a method of sharing the use of what I assume was a transatlantic cable, this meant that the first word spoken didn't get transmitted. Since the call was concerning the price for a major purchase, for example £40 000, the vital word was missing! It took a few more moments to sort that satisfactorily.

Locations of Silsden's Post Office

- P1 Bridge Street area, John Berry
- P2 54 Kirkgate, John & Thomas Driver
- P3 Wesley Place, William Moore
- P4 St John Street, William Moore
- P5 65 Post Office Building Kirkgate, William Moore
- P6 66 Kirkgate, William Moore and Emily Wilkinson
- P7, 39 Kirkgate, Twiggs Newsagents



