

Conclusion

Considerably more research is required into the history of these units, but sufficient has been established for one to reach the conclusion that with a population of around 5,000 at this time, the County played its full part in the defence of the United Kingdom.

POST OFFICES ON THE ISLE OF BUTE

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The history of postal services within the Isle of Bute can be divided into three parts:

1. The evolution of postal services within the island
2. The establishment of post offices
3. The postal markings used in connection with 1 and 2

This paper is confined to the first and second of these divisions. Further information can be obtained from a comprehensive book by J. A. Mackay (1), and in two publications of the Scottish Postmark Group (2, 3).

A post office in Rothesay was opened on April 5, 1767. Very little is known about its whereabouts, but the quantity of mail passing through it must have been small since its two-line namestamp wore so slowly that it continued in use for 40 years. The spelling was ROTH/SAY, and the mark was undated. It must be remembered that the familiar adhesive postage stamps or labels were not introduced as a form of receipt until May 1840 when the "Penny Black" and "Twopence Blue" were put on sale. They had to be cancelled to prevent their re-use but other marks were applied as backstamps and early letters carry a plethora of undated and dated marks which make them of much interest to collectors.

Up to 1831, the recipients of letters had to call at Rothesay post-office to collect their mail, obviously a time-wasting and unsatisfactory arrangement. Inevitably the bulk of the mail emanated from Mount Stuart where a foot-post operated three times a week up to 1800, and four times a week thereafter. For a time there seems to have been a sub-office at Mount Stuart but it had closed before 1825 and does not appear to have re-opened. Evidence of its existence rests merely on a single letter sheet dated 1821, franked by the Marquess of Bute and addressed to London.

During 1834 a second foot-post was established from Rothesay to Kames Castle and a receiving house was opened in Port Bannatyne. In connection with this foot post, the ROTHESAY/PENNY POST mark was adopted for local mail in June 1834. Though the farthest extent of this foot-post was only 2½ miles, the runner took a circular route. On the outward run houses away from the coast were served, while Kames and Ardbeg were visited on the return. Port Bannatyne changed its

name to Kamesburgh in 1857, and KAMESBURGH in italic capitals, between two pairs of horizontal lines, was used for a short time as a local namestamp.

A third foot-post was started in 1845 between Rothesay and Ascog and was soon followed by a fourth one to Kingarth in 1847. These posts were daily, but by 1852 increasing population justified 2nd deliveries to Port Bannatyne and to Ascog. A third daily delivery began in Rothesay in 1883, and was soon followed by a post from Rothesay to Straad. Straad had a sub-office from November 18, 1897 to December 31, 1982.

In 1847-48 the Kingarth postman was asked to clear a wall-box at Kilchattan Bay. Kilchattan Bay grew in stature and during 1881 it got its own sub-office and undertook the clearance of the wall-box.

The first of the horse-posts in Bute began in late 1883 when the postman to Kingarth and Kilchattan Bay was mounted. The Kingarth sub-office closed on 31 May, 1946.

In 1887, a Rothesay-Kerrylamont rural post began and in the following year it was extended in the tourist season to Kingarth and Kilchattan Bay. Extensions from Port Bannatyne to Kildavanan and from Straad to St. Ninian's Point took place in 1890-92.

During 1901, postmen on horseback were replaced by a horsebus or mailcar, enabling parcels to be carried. Movement of mails and parcels by motor-bus began in 1909 and in 1910 a cycle-post route was instituted between Rothesay and Kerrylamont.

To return to Rothesay. Centripetally, its size and population increased and the office was upgraded. Tourism caused a dramatic rise in the volume of mail in the summer months. Parcel post began in 1883 and added to the bulk and complexity of the mail. Even as late as 1895, the post office was situated in premises provided by the postmaster, but it was decided to upgrade it to a Crown Office. The site for the building was eventually settled in 1895 and the building in Bishop Street was opened in 1897. The office thereafter took on the responsibilities for seven small rural sub-offices in the western part of the Cowal peninsula, at Colintrave, Conchra (until it closed on May 14, 1909), Glendaruel, Kames, Kilfinan, Millhouse, Otter Ferry and Tighnabruaich. This involved taking mail across to Bute via the Rhubodach Ferry to Rothesay, whence it was distributed. This arrangement was terminated in December 1980, the Cowal mail then being moved by road to Dunoon, and by ferry to Greenock. Mail from Kames, Kilfinan and Otter Ferry sub-offices went first to Tighnabruaich, where it was hand-stamped, but mail from Glendaruel went to Colintrave, where it received the latter's handstamp. Kilfinan

sub-office was closed on February 4, 1985. Millhouse sub-office was situated in the former time-office of the Kames Gunpowder Company's works. It closed on March 31, 1982.

The main Rothesay office had to be enlarged in 1907 and it continued to be the focus of the island mail, adapting the collection and distribution of letters and parcels to changing modes of transport, and generally improving postal services throughout the island. Rothesay continued to be head post office until October 6, 1968, when it was downgraded to a salaried sub-office. It eventually became a branch office and no longer postmarks mail. Everything goes by the frequent car ferry service to Wemyss Bay and thence to Greenock by road, and, if necessary, back to Rothesay for distribution in the island. The Rothesay office operates five mail vans around the island, four vans being in constant use while the other is on standby.

Over the years, Rothesay had no less than six sub-offices within the town. These were at Ardbeg Road, Barone Road, Columshill Street, Craigmore Pier, Gallowgate and High Street. Craigmore got a pier in 1877, and the district developed rapidly as a result. The first town sub-office (or Receiving House) was opened at the pierhead on December 15, 1884, being upgraded to a money-order office in 1886. Some delay occurred before a dated handstamp was put into use in January, 1887. Craigmore Pier sub-office was closed on May 23, 1980.

The provision of a sub-office serving the northern part of the town was under discussion in the late 1880's. An office in Ardbeg Road was opened in March, 1889 and is still functional. A second town sub-office was established in Gallowgate on November 30, 1896, and is still open.

Two further town sub-offices were opened simultaneously on August 1, 1903, these were at Barone Road and at High Street. Barone Road continued in use until the retirement of sub-postmaster Mr D. C. McQuarrie, when it was closed on January 31, 1914, being succeeded by Columshill Street, which lasted until July 19, 1972. High Street sub-office lasted for 72 years, until July 25, 1975. Thus there are now two sub-offices in operation in the town: Ardbeg Road and Gallowgate.

The provision of rural sub-offices has already been briefly alluded to, but there remain to be mentioned those at Ascog, Port Bannatyne and Kamesburgh, and Kerrycroy and Straad. Though Ascog is now practically a suburb of Rothesay, it was a separate village a century and a half ago. The area was feued for the building of villas in the 1840s, and a receiving house was established there on January 3, 1845. After 1852 a spectacular framed name stamp went into use and has been recorded as a cancellation. It was withdrawn in 1860 and was later

replaced by a circular dated stamp, of which several versions exist. Ascog sub-office was closed on the last day of 1968.

The village of Port Bannatyne had its name altered to Kamesburgh in 1857, and in the spring of that year the office was given an undated name-stamp, which possibly had a 19-year career until its replacement by a Port Bannatyne circular datestamp in 1879.

The hamlet of Kerrycroy began in 1803 as a cluster of estate cottages. In the 1890s a number of half-timbered houses were built, a village green was created and a sub-office opened in the village shop on May 4, 1900. The office had a comparatively brief career and was closed on January 31, 1917. Considering its remote situation, Straad had a surprisingly long existence of over 80 years.

In the southern half of Bute, Kingarth was given a receiving house for mail in 1847. It used an undated circular namestamp which was used as a backstamp on letters and also as a cancellation on adhesive stamps. This was withdrawn in 1860, and for the next 44 years Kingarth had no form of postmark until a circular datestamp was put into use in April 1904. The office was closed on May 31, 1946.

On the west side of Bute, the end of the electric tramline at Ettrick Bay could be a busy place in the height of a summer day but it was not a centre of population and never merited the establishment of a post office. Posting facilities were in fact refused by the Post Office but the tramway company provided its own facilities at the terminus. Cards posted there unofficially received a small framed cachet which was struck in violet ink and read POSTED AT ETTRICK BAY, BUTE. Probably mail was conveyed back to civilisation via the tram, and the cachet has been recorded on postcards from 1906 in conjunction with the official postmarks of Port Bannatyne.

Figs. 1 and 2 illustrate some obsolete postmarks emanating from Bute. The bar-chart (Fig. 3) shows the life-span of the 14 island offices.

The writer's thanks are due to Mr James Mackay for permission to extract information from his book 'Islands Postal History Series No. 6,' and also to Mr Campbell of the Head Post Office in Greenock for the dates of some recent closures.

References:

- (1) "Islands Postal History Series: No. 6 Bute." Published privately by the author James A. Mackay, 11 Newall Terrace, Dumfries, 1979.
- (2) J. R. Henderson "Post Offices in Scotland." Published by The Scottish Postmark Group, 1966.
- (3) "Scots Local Name Stamps." Published by The Scottish Postmark Group, 1964.

Fig.1: Rothesay handstamps. A variety from the earliest (1767) to the type bearing the Rothesay office number '298' which were in use a century later, by then cancelling adhesive stamps. The '453' marks were in use in the early part of the 19th century when letters were charged by mileage (453 miles from London, via 'G' for Glasgow) and by the number of sheets.

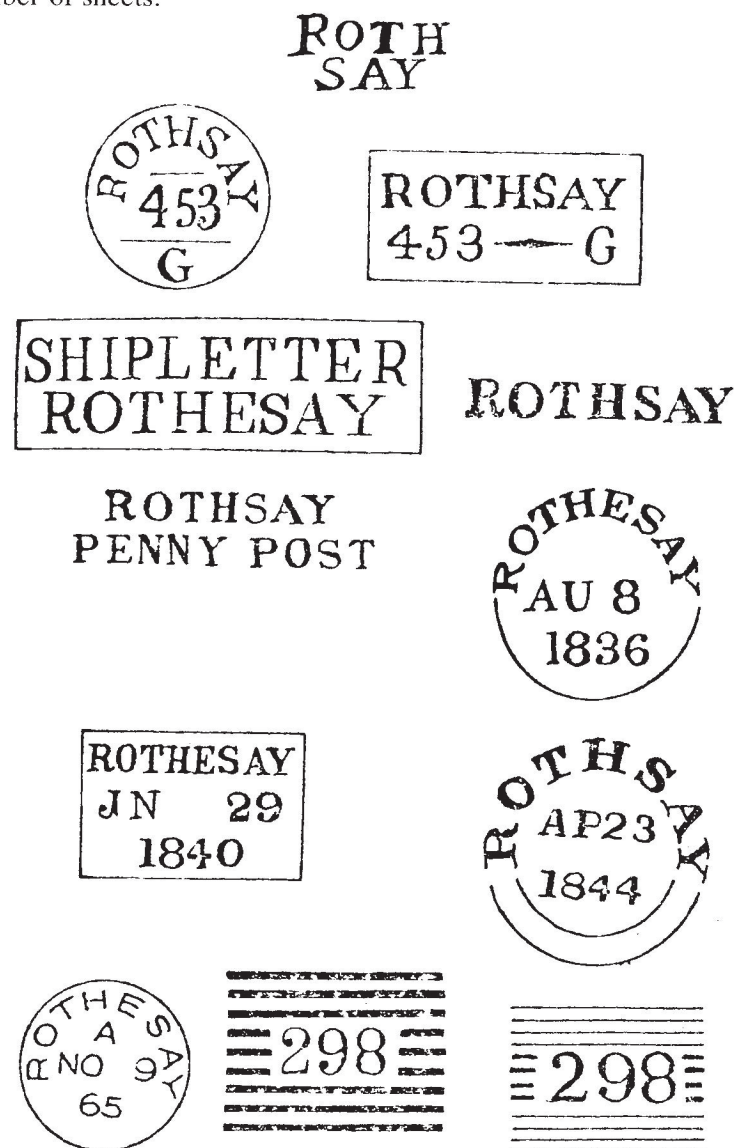


Fig.2: The circular MOUNT STUART handstamp is the only evidence for the existence of a post office there. It closed before 1825. The other four undated marks were 'Scots Local' handstamps, which were in use as backstamps, and occasionally as cancellations, in the 1850s. The centre and bottom part of the page illustrates a variety of handstamps used at sub-offices.

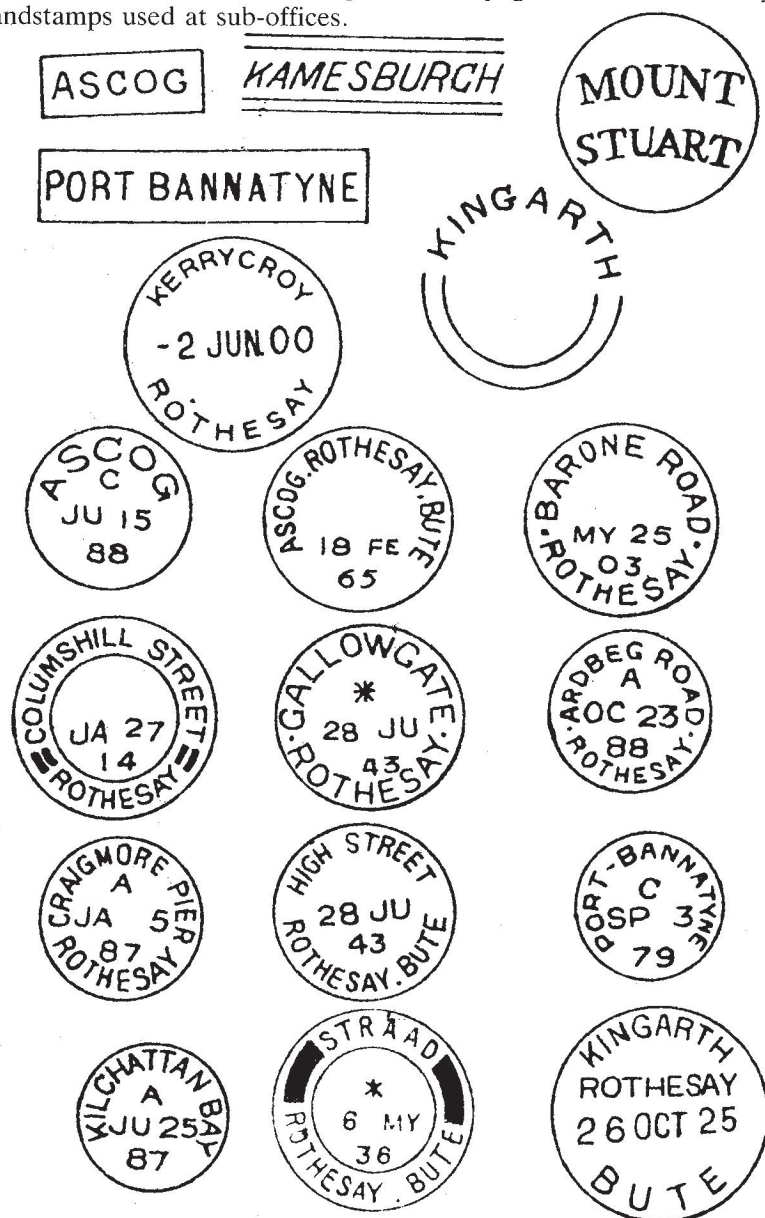


Fig.3

