

# The First Sheffield Postmaster

by Eric Buckley

First published in *The Sheffield Philatelist*

Volume 1, Number 6, May 1951.



**The Sheffield Philatelic Society**

During the month of April 1951 we note that it was just 250 years ago that the first known Postmaster of Sheffield died, for there is an entry in the Sheffield parish register which records the death of 'Georgius Carr de Coffee House de Sheffield' on April 20th 1701. His grave is in the cathedral graveyard, and on the gravestone is also named his successor as the Postmaster, one Jonathan Turner.

Beyond these simple facts nothing is known of our first Postmaster. His coffee house was situated somewhere between George Street and Boots in High Street, and according to Post Office records, he was Postmaster from 1688 to 1695.

It is known that a regular twice weekly post between London and Sheffield was in operation in 1663, which was increased to thrice weekly in 1691. I have seen an original post bill in the public record office in London which advertised this post in 1663, but there is no mention of where the post was delivered in Sheffield. Furthermore the post did not go any further than Sheffield. Apparently any mail for Sheffield originating in London was bagged up there and was carried by a series of stages on horseback up the Holyhead Road as far as Towcester. There it was thrown off, the main post then continued, also in stages, on to Holyhead for Ireland. The Sheffield and intermediate post was then carried, still on horseback, and still in stages from Towcester to Sheffield, via the following post-towns:

- Northampton;
- Market Harborough;
- Leicester;

- Loughborough;
- Derby;
- Chesterfield; and
- Sheffield.

The horseman approached Sheffield from Newfield green, Heeley, and Little Sheffield. This is known because there was a dispute in the latter part of the 17th century whereby the Duke of Norfolk stopped up the highway near to Gleadless Moor by putting a chain across the road four times a year, to prevent it being claimed as a public highway. A Nicholas Shiercliffe in evidence claims that he had seen the road chained up, and "carriers, pack-horses, carts, and carriages stopped from going that way without asking leave or paying something". The route was also given as described above.

What was Sheffield like in 1700? According To the 'Local Register' published in 1830, the population of Sheffield was round about 2500, not taking into account the villages and hamlets which have since been swallowed up as Sheffield expanded. Sheffield at this time extended no further than the wicker to the north, Moorhead to the south, what is now Leopold Street to the west, and Broad Street to the east. Cutlery was the main industry of the little town, and as is well-known the Cutlers' Company was formed in 1624, so that by 1700 Sheffield was well established as the centre of the cutlery trade. It was this factor which started the agitation for better communications with London for the cutlers to carry their wares for sale. When one studies the postal history of Sheffield this fact crops up again and

again, the fact that Sheffield business men have always grumbled about the poorness of communicating with the outside world - and they still do!

Even though Sheffield was so small at this time it must have had some importance to induce the then Postmaster General Daniel O'Neale to set up a post in 1663, between London and Sheffield twice a week. Again it must have been a well used service for it was increased to three times a week in 1691. Thus was the Sheffield of George Carr's time. What of his Coffee House? At this period these coffee houses were centres of social, political, and commercial activities of the community, and so Carr's would be the obvious place for the post to be left. In those days letters were not collected and delivered as in these more "enlightened" days. Many well know businesses have

been founded in such places e.g. Lloyds Insurance Company. As regards Carr's Coffee House, according to the Burgery Records it was the meeting place on several occasions, in 1687, 1688, 1695, 1704, and 1714 of the Burgesses who were the forerunners of the present day Municipal Corporations. Thus Carr's house was the centre of some importance, and it would seem obvious that owing to this, and the attends importance of Carr himself, he was the right man in the right job. It must be stressed here, however, that post offices in this period were nothing like those of today. They were Receiving Houses only and whenever a new Postmaster was appointed the Receiving House was moved to the new Postmaster's place of business. For the handling of mail to and from Sheffield, Carr received £10 a year.

---

---

You can find more articles on Sheffield's postal history at our web site.

The Sheffield Philatelic Society meets at 7.15 pm on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Thursday of each month (except August) at the Central United Reformed Church, 60 Norfolk Street, Sheffield, S1 2JB.

For a programme of events please visit:

[www.sheffieldps.org.uk](http://www.sheffieldps.org.uk)