

# WILLIAM DOCKWRA

## AND THE REST OF THE UNDERTAKERS

THE STORY OF THE  
LONDON PENNY POST  
1680-82

*by*  
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*This way great Dockwra forth did chalk,  
As a Parterre from the Grand Walk  
Leads many ways, his nimble Men,  
After their Round, return and meet again,  
For twenty Miles these nimble Mercuries  
Carefully convey advice.  
Not Letters grav'd on Sculls, or Pidgeon-post,  
Of greater Secrecy can boast.  
Hail mighty Dockwra, Son of Art,  
With Flavio, Middleton, or Swart.  
In the foremost Rank of Fame,  
Thou shalt fix thy lasting Name.  
For new Inventors Fate thee hurt,  
To be damn'd or beggar'd for't.*

*From State Poems ; continued from  
the time of O. Cromwell to this  
present year, 1697.*

Even penny postage was nothing new in 1680. As long previous as 1659 John Hill, a Yorkshire Attorney, had published his pamphlet *A Penny Post or a Vindication of the Liberty and Birthright of every Englishman in Carrying Merchant's and other men's Letters*. In an advertisement of the General Post Office in *Mercurius Publicus* in April, 1661, it was stated "All Gentlemen and others are desired to take notice that the Post Office hath been abused by severall persons, who have falsely pretended themselves to be appointed to receive letters from the Post Office, and have exacted a penny a letter above the due port, alledging it to be for carrying the same to the Office." By 1677 the Post Office had recognised the right of receivers to charge a penny for bringing letters from the more distant suburbs. Thomas Gardiner, reporting in that year to the Duke of York, wrote in a *General Survey of the Post Office*, "Receivers (having no salaries) bringing from the Remoter places as Greenwich, Deptford, Blackwall, Southwark and such like receive besides the port a penny for everyman's parcell more or less."

This book sets forth the results of my own researches but I must acknowledge the helpful ideas and suggestions put forward by my friends and in particular by Mr. Robson Lowe.

I should like to add a word of thanks to the many officials of the British Museum, the Public Record Office and the Guildhall Library whose names I do not know but whose unfailing courtesy, many helpful suggestions and real interest in my researches have helped so much to make this book possible.

If any reader has new information about the London Penny Post of 1680-82, I shall be most grateful if he will write to me care of my publishers.

London, May, 1952.

T. TODD.

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## CHAPTER I

### LONDON OF THE 1680's

THE London of nearly three hundred years ago was a very different place from London as we know it today in mid-twentieth century. To understand and to appreciate the penny postal system set up and run by William Dockwra and the "rest of the undertakers" in the early 1680's, it is essential to know something of the background—social, political and religious—against which this most remarkable undertaking was carried through to success.

Today, although London is by far the largest city in the British Isles, there are other large cities such as Glasgow, Birmingham, Liverpool and Manchester with vast populations. In the 1680's, however, the population of London represented one-tenth of the population of the whole country, and was the only city of any size. Gregory King, at the time of the Revolution of 1688, reckoned that the population of England was some 5,500,000. A fifth of the population, however, were in receipt of some form of parish relief. "Labouring people, out-servants, cottagers and paupers" and their families made up half the population. Freeholders, farmers, shopkeepers, tradesmen and their families accounted for nearly two million more.

The population of London in the 1680's has been estimated to be some half million but the second city in the country—Norwich—had no more than 30,000 inhabitants, while Bristol, the third city, had a few thousand less.

London owed its greatness to its eminence as a port and as a centre for the distribution of goods of all kinds. John Ogilby in his *Brief Observations of London* which accompanied his map of the metropolis published in 1677, wrote that London was : " commodiously situated both for Pleasure

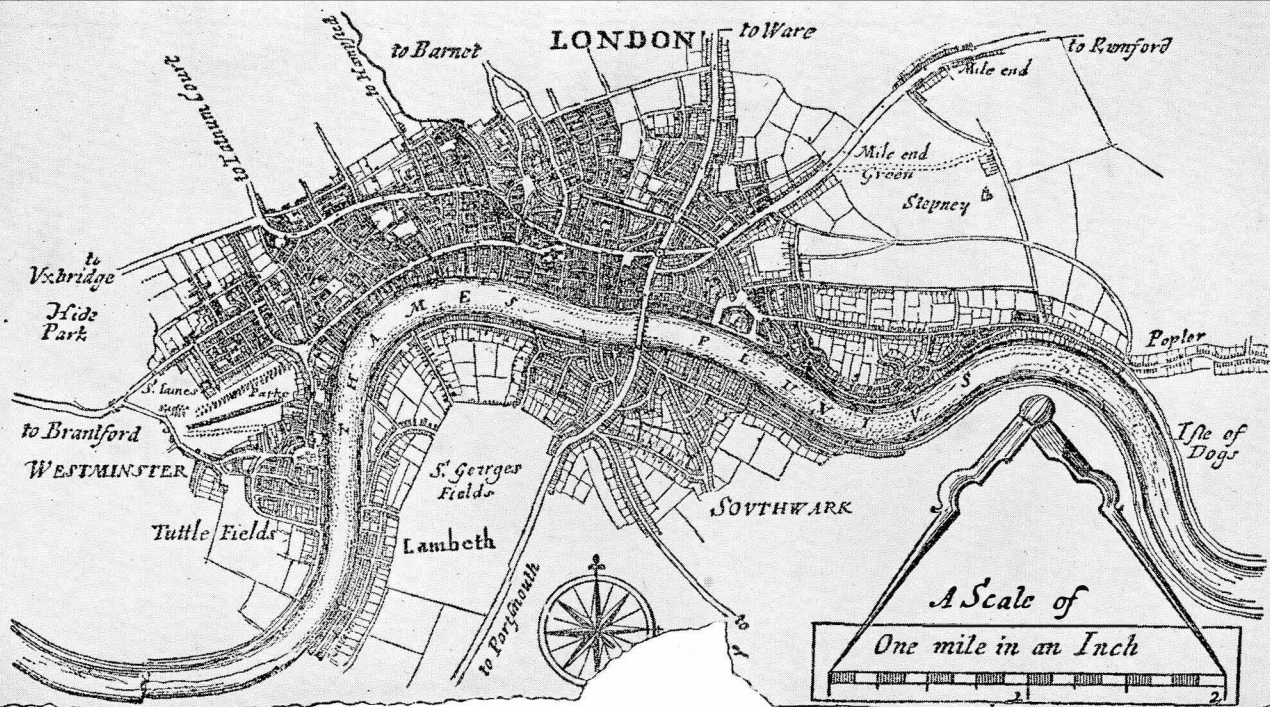
and Profit, the River of Thames washing the South side, or dividing it from Southwark; being distant about 60 miles from the Eastern and Southern Seas; whereby 'tis equally Accommodated for Importing Merchandise from Abroad, and receiving necessary Supplies of Provisions at Home. The City and Liberties contain 113 Parishes, and is divided into six and twenty wards . . . it contains within the walls 380 acres . . . but within the Liberties 680 acres; all as full of good and great Buildings as conveniently can allow."

Town and rural life were not so sharply divided as they are today and a mile or two's walk from the busy streets and markets would bring the Londoner of Stuart times to the open country. To the west London was bounded by Westminster, which itself extended no further than "Tuttle" (Tothill) Fields. To the north the limits were the open fields beyond Clerkenwell, Old Street and Bunhill Fields, and Shoreditch; to the east were Goodmans Fields and East Smithfield. Mile End, Stepney and Poplar were all in the country. The Thames to the south was a busy highway on which hundreds of watermen navigated their boats, taking the traveller not only up or down the river but from one bank to the other, for London Bridge was the only road over the Thames below Kingston. London Bridge—built a little to the east of the present bridge—with its nineteen mighty arches, houses and shops, was one of the "Remarkables of Europe" and nearly a fifth of a mile long.

Along the northern bank of the river were stretched around the Bridge the many wharves and docks and to the west the great mansions of the noblemen with their gardens and stairs leading down to the water's edge.

The new St. Paul's cathedral was far advanced and much of the destruction of the Great Fire of 1666 had been repaired. The traders of London had their own corporations or companies, their halls or guilds resembling "so many stately Pallaces." There were, too, several companies of merchants trading to foreign parts who met for business twice a day at the Royal Exchange which the Mercers had rebuilt since the Great Fire.

"This great and populous City," wrote John Ogilby,



A map of London at the time William Dockwra set up his Penny Post in 1680. The map is taken from "London Survey'd" by John Ogilby and William Morgan, 1677. The only known copy of this book is in the British Museum.

"is supply'd with all sorts of Provisions and Necessaries for Sustenance and Delight, as well from the Shops and Butchers-Shambles, as the many markets, wherewith both the City and Suburbs are furnish'd, and they plentifully stor'd both from land and water. The Thames twice a-day, brings into her Bosom, Ships Fraught with the Rarities and Riches of the world."

And yet the London of the seventeenth century was—apart from the great mansion houses of the wealthy—a city composed largely of wooden houses crowded into narrow streets and alleys so closely that the overhanging upper floors nearly touched and shut out the light from above. The streets were ill kept—if at all—but this did not matter to those who hired a sedan chair or hackney coach. Filth and garbage filled the gutters and was thrown indiscriminately into the open streams, such as the Fleet, that wound through the houses to the Thames. Sanitation was no more than a cess-pool; the graveyards of the city churches were over full and the whole great City was filled with the most terrible stench. One contemporary writer reporting in the year of the Great Plague wrote: "There is such a stinck in London that there was a man I knew upon the Exchange who could never stay in London above an hour, in so much that he rid twelves miles every day he came to the Exchange and tied his horse to a pillar there, took a turn or two, grew sick, and immediately took his horse and rid Post out, and this at least three times a week!"

The Great Fire of London destroyed the centre of the city—the part where the merchants lived and carried on their business. The slum districts of the Liberties outside the walls—St. Giles, Cripplegate, Whitechapel, Westminster and across the river, Lambeth, were entirely untouched. But even the part of London destroyed was rebuilt on the old plan within a few years and by the end of the century Christopher Wren had completed much of the rebuilding of the churches and public buildings.

The City of London of these times was still surrounded by the great Wall with its bastions and gates. The extent of the Liberties which marked the line of the Freedom extended



some little way outside the wall and represented the overflow from the city proper. The limit of the Liberties where it crossed the main streets, such as at Holborn and the junction of Fleet Street and the Strand, were marked by "Bars," perpetuated today in such names as Temple Bar.

The Fleet, known as the New Canal (now Farringdon Street) was navigable as far as Holborn (now Holborn Viaduct). The markets at Smithfield, Billingsgate, Newgate and the several markets around Leadenhall did a brisk business in food and other commodities of all kinds.

All classes of society mingled together when in search of entertainment, perhaps on a visit to the Globe Theatre or to see the bull and bear baiting on the South Bank, to look in wonder on the lunatics in Bedlam, or to see the famous Jack Ketch carrying out the gruesome details of an execution at Tyburn.

Taverns and Coffee houses abounded in every street and were the clearing houses for the latest news. But in the last years of the 1670's no King or Kingdom was the subject of discussion for on every man's lips was the name of an obscure cloth-worker's son from Norfolk—the notorious Titus Oates.

## CHAPTER II

### TITUS OATES AND THE POPISH PLOT

STRANGE indeed were the circumstances that led Titus Oates — surely one of the most corrupt men ever to dominate the pages of English History—to spring so suddenly to fame and infamy. In the summer of 1678 he was no more than an unknown rogue, destitute and near starvation. By the autumn of that same year he was living in the King's Palace of Whitehall with all his wants provided and a generous income into the bargain. On his word alone even the highest were arrested and put to death. The Saviour of the Nation, as he was known, could do no wrong.

At the root of his success was the almost nation-wide hatred of the Roman Catholics. The last Roman Catholic monarch—"Bloody" Mary Tudor—had died a hundred and twenty years before but the people still feared the Pope and all that he stood for. If proof of the wickedness of the Roman Catholics were needed many of their "wicked deeds" could be cited. The Catholics, according to their opponents, had been responsible for the Guy Fawkes Gunpowder Plot of 1605 and had been blamed for burning down London by starting the Great Fire of 1666.<sup>1</sup>

Charles II while professing Protestantism would, no doubt, have changed the established Church of England to conform with that of Rome had he considered such a change could have been brought about peacefully. His brother James, Duke of York, was a professed Catholic and made no secret of his feelings.

<sup>1</sup>The original inscription around the base of the pedestal of the Monument read "This Pillar was set up in perpetual Remembrance of the most dreadful burning of this Protestant City, begun and carried on by the Treachery and Malice of the Popish Faction, in the beginning of September, in the Year of our Lord 1666, in order to the carrying on their horrid Plot for extirpating the Protestant Religion and Old English Liberty, and introducing Popery and Slavery."

The two political parties—named Tories and Whigs by Oates—were ranged one against the other. The Tories had behind them the King and the noblemen, while on the side of the Whigs were the rich merchants of the City of London.

With the object of securing the Protestant succession and avoiding civil war on Charles's death, the first Whig Parliament in May 1679 proposed the Exclusion Bill which would have prevented James ever becoming King. Charles, however, stepped in and prorogued Parliament immediately in order to prevent the passage of the Bill. In this summer of 1679 Charles had sent his illegitimate son, the Duke of Monmouth, at the head of an English Army to suppress the Covenanters in Scotland. Monmouth had defeated the rebels at Bothwell Brig on 22nd June and returned to London at the head of the Army, a popular hero. Towards the end of August Charles fell ill and his death was expected at any moment. The Whigs were prepared to keep James from the throne and, if necessary, back Monmouth and his new army against him. James was summoned to his brother's death bed from Brussels where Charles had sent him on account of the hatred with which he was regarded by many at home. Arriving post haste at Windsor, however, he found Charles recovered. There was to be no civil war.

Charles, now in good health, exiled James to Scotland and Monmouth to Holland in September. In October he prorogued the newly elected second Whig Parliament.

November 17th, the anniversary of the accession of Queen Elizabeth (and the end of Queen Mary's Roman Catholic doctrines) was celebrated as a public holiday and an effigy of the Pope was carried in procession through the streets and publicly burned. But let us look back for a moment to the autumn of two years before.

It was in September 1678 that Titus Oates disclosed to the Privy Council a "Damnable and Hellish Popish Plot" to fire the city of London, murder the King and massacre all Protestants who refused to embrace the Roman Catholic religion.

Titus Oates was a man, as his former life showed, ready

to sell his services to anyone willing to pay for them. Brought up as a Baptist, Oates became an Anglican clergyman at the Restoration but in 1677 went to live in a Jesuit College, first in Spain and then in the Low Countries, from which latter college he was expelled in June of the following year. Returning to England he set to work with the help of a fanatical anti-Catholic friend of his, Ezerel Tongue, to concoct his plot. Details of the imaginary plot were written out under some eighty headings and a list of conspirators added for good measure. Not only was the plot disclosed to the Privy Council but to make doubly sure that the disclosures would become publicly known Oates also made a declaration of the details of the Plot before Sir Edmund Berry Godfrey, a well known City magistrate.

Charles was little worried by the plot. "Would they murder me to put thee, James, on the throne?" he remarked lightly to his brother. But others in London were ready to believe anything of the hated Papists.

The Duke of York's secretary, Edward Coleman, was one of the conspirators named by Oates. Coleman was immediately arrested and, fortunately for Oates, a box of treasonable letters was found hidden in his house. Some of the letters planned a conversion of the country to Roman Catholicism by force. Oates was in luck and the rest of his plot was believed. Two weeks later Sir Edmund Berry Godfrey was found murdered on Primrose Hill, his sword thrust through his body. There was now no doubt in the minds of London's half million that in truth a "damnable and hellish plot" was about to be loosed on them. The Whigs under Lord Shaftesbury were quick to seize the opportunity and roused the people against the Catholics. Godfrey's corpse was given a state entry into London and for two days before the funeral procession of a thousand of the City's leading men, the Protestants swore revenge. That Sir Edmund Berry Godfrey was the first victim of the Popish Plot, none doubted.

The panic caused by the Plot was slow to die down. Coleman's letters had implicated the heir to the throne and in November 1678 the Exclusion of James from the succession was first suggested. Coleman was convicted and in the

following months many Catholics died through the perjury of Oates. Plots and Counter Plots, trials and hangings did little to allay the fears of the population and the annual ' Burning of the Pope ' ceremony on 17th November ensured that the population should be kept at a fever pitch of hatred against Popery.

Such was the London in which William Dockwra and his associates planned the London penny post in 1679.

## CHAPTER III

### THE NEWSPAPERS AND THE PENNY POST

WHEN Charles had suddenly prorogued the Whig Parliament in May 1679 he had forgotten in his haste that the "Printing Act" of 1663 under which all printed matter was banned unless licensed by the State or the Church, expired the following month. Under this Act the number of Master Printers was limited to twenty, all of whom (except the University Printers of Oxford and Cambridge) were established in London.

The lapsing of the Licensing Act at once brought about printed opposition to the official Gazette, and on 7th July, 1679, there appeared the first number of Benjamin Harris's newspaper the *Domestick Intelligence; or News both from City and Country. Published to prevent false reports.* In the following year the paper was renamed the *Protestant (Domestick) Intelligence*. Harris's paper had the backing of the Earl of Shaftesbury, leader of the Whigs. It has been suggested that Titus Oates acted throughout this period under the direct instructions of Lord Shaftesbury. While no proof of such an association exists it seems undoubted that they were in close touch at this time.

Within a few weeks of the publication of Harris's *Domestick Intelligence* another newspaper of the same name was published in opposition by an Irishman, Nathaniel Thompson. The title was changed on 6th September, 1679, to the *True Domestick Intelligence*. Battle was joined between the two Intelligences, and other Whig newspapers were published in opposition to Thompson, or "Popish Nat," as he was nicknamed. Some half a dozen Whig papers appeared before they were forbidden by the King's Proclamation of May, 1680, but they started up again in the following October.

Until the expiration of the Printing Act the only way of circulating political news was by newsletters. These letters were written at regular intervals—generally twice a week—copied out by hand and distributed over the whole country through the Post Office. Henry Muddiman wrote the official newsletter on behalf of the King. Opposition Whig newsletters were soon being sent out and in December, 1679, three of their writers were brought before the Privy Council charged with writing seditious letters.

The Post Office was a most convenient way for distributing the Whig anti-Catholic newsletters but the Whigs were far more interested in circulating their propaganda throughout London than throughout the rest of the country. What more natural, then, than that Lord Shaftesbury should have backed the scheme of William Dockwra and Robert Murray for the establishment of a London Penny Post under cover of which the Whig newsletters could be distributed rapidly throughout the whole of London and the suburbs?

Whether the plan for the Penny Post was the work of Dockwra or Murray is unlikely ever to be known. Dockwra signed himself "Author of the Penny Post" and Murray described himself as the "Inventer and first Proposer."

The plan was in all likelihood first suggested by Murray and worked into a practical proposition by Dockwra. It was planned we are told in 1678.<sup>1</sup> Possibly finance, that bar to so many plans, held up the establishment of the Penny Post. It would seem that neither Dockwra nor Murray were in a position to finance such an expensive undertaking.

William Dockwra was born a little before 1640, and on 22nd January, 1663-4 the Earl of Southampton, Lord High Treasurer of England, appointed him (in the Treasury Warrant<sup>2</sup> his name is spelt Docwra) a customs under-searcher of the Port of London. The Earl of Southampton in the words of the warrant did "give and grant unto Willm. Docwra of London, Gent. the office or place of under Searcher or subsearcher in the said Port of London upon the surrender

<sup>1</sup> *True Domesick Intelligence*, No. 77, 26-30 March, 1680.

<sup>2</sup> Early Treasury Warrants in the Public Record Office (T.51) Vol. 10, pp. 247, 248.

of John Norwood, Gent. to have hold and enjoy the said office of undersearcher . . . during his Majesty's pleasure, together with all such fees, profits, advantages & commodities, as usually are."

Thomas De-Laune in his *Present State of London* records that "since the happy Restoration of His Majesty, there has been in all Eleven persons Under-Searchers in that office." The name of William Dockwra is the fourth name of those listed who have "disposed of their place by His Majesties grace and favours."

These under-searchers were paid £12 a year (there is a Treasury Warrant dated 4th February, 1663-4 to pay William Dockwra this sum) but as De-Laune records there were in addition "sundry Fees settled upon them by Authority of Parliament which are paid them by Masters of Ships, and Merchants." The under-searchers had to attend "from morning to night" but undoubtedly found their occupation a most profitable one, and the under-searchers can have found little difficulty when they wished to "dispose of their places" in spite of the "Malice and Envy that has many times been making attempts upon them," as De-Laune put it.

Dockwra kept this position for "above ten years," i.e., until 1673-4.<sup>1</sup>

There is also evidence<sup>2</sup> that Dockwra was a part owner of the sailing ship *Anne* which was trading to the "Guiny" coast of Africa in defiance of the Royal African Company's monopoly of this trade. In 1676 the *Anne* was seized by Captain Richard Dickenson, Commander of the Man-of-War *Hunter*. Twenty years after, in 1696, William Dockwra succeeded in recovering £2,630 from the Royal African Company who were appealing against this judgement in 1704. when they set out their case in a printed statment, a copy of which is now in the British Museum.

William Dockwra and his wife Rebecca had eight children (the names of William, Peter and Richard are known) and at least one grandson—Thomas. The baptisms

<sup>1</sup> *Present State of London* by Thos. De Laune, 1681.

<sup>2</sup> *The Royal Africa Company of England, Appellant v William Dockwra and Others, Respondents. The Case of the Appellants.* Broadside (1704) in the British Museum. Cup. 645 b.11. (29).



of the first two children (24th March, 1680-1 and 12th June, 1682) are recorded in the Parish Register of St. Andrew Undershaft which stands opposite the Leadenhall Street end of Lime Street.

A little more is known of Robert Murray. He was born in the Strand, London, on 12th December, 1633, his father being a Scotsman and his mother English according to the Aubrey MS. in the Bodleian Library at Oxford. According to the *Dictionary of National Biography*, however, he was born in 1635, the Strand being again mentioned as the place of his birth. He was, again following the *Dictionary of National Biography*, the son of Robert Murray *cives et scissor Londini*. "In 1649 he was entered on the books of the Clothworkers Company and took up his freedom in 1660. He is subsequently spoken of as 'milliner' and again as 'upholsterer' but describes himself in his publications as 'gent,' possibly having retired from the trade."

He was identified by Anthony Wood as the Robert Murray who was "clerk to the General Commissioners for the Revenue of Ireland and clerk to the Commissioners of the Grand Excise of England" but this identification is questioned by the *Dictionary of National Biography*.

John Aubrey in his *Brief Lives* says that Ezerel Tongue, one of the chief collaborators of Titus Oates, was a friend of Murray's. Tongue had invented the way of teaching children to write a good hand by "writing over with black ink copies printed from copper plates printed in red ink." After Tongue's death Murray engraved several of these plates and printed off copies in red.

Aubrey says Murray was the "first that invented and introduced into this City the Club of Commerce, consisting of one of each trade; whereof there were after very many elected and are still continued in this city."

In 1676 Robert Murray published *A Proposal for the Advancement of Trade, upon such principles as must necessarily enforce it* which the *Dictionary of National Biography* describes as "a proposal for a combined bank and Lombard or *mont de piété* for the issue of credit against dead stock

deposited at 6 per cent. interest." Aubrey records "that he set up his Bank of Credit at Devonshire House in Bishopsgate Street Without where men depositing their goods and merchandize were furnished with bills of current credit at two-thirds or three-quarters of the value of the said goods according to the intrinsic value of money."

Dockwra and Murray started their projected Penny Post in March, 1680, setting up their chief office in the former mansion house of Sir Robert Abdy<sup>1</sup> in Lime Street, where Dockwra had also taken up his residence. The two originators were joined by other "undertakers," as they described themselves, but only two are known by name and the exact identity of one is in some doubt.

First there was Dr. Hugh Chamberlen. It is not unlikely that Murray's interest in banking matters first brought him in contact with Dr. Chamberlen. Dr. Chamberlen, "physician and economist," was the son of Peter Chamberlen and son-in-law of Sir Hugh Myddleton, and was born at Blackfriars between 1630 and 1634, so that he would be of about the same age as Robert Murray. Hugh Chamberlen was made a physician in ordinary to the King in 1673 and was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society in April, 1681. In 1666 he had advanced a project for freeing London from the Plague.

The fourth of the known undertakers was, according to two of the Intelligences "Mr. Henry Nevil, alias Pain." *Smith's Current Intelligence* stated that Oates had denounced the penny post as the "dextrous invention" of Nevil. *The True Domestic Intelligence* published a few days later denies this but while not denying that "Mr. Henry Nevil (alias Pain) was associated with the penny post" stated that those running it were "greater enemies of Popery than those who asperse them."

Nearly twenty-three years later, in January 1703, William Dockwra himself in a statement published under his

<sup>1</sup> There are in the British Museum five letters signed by Robert Abdy but there is no address at the head of the letters other than London. So far it has not been possible to locate Sir Robert Abdy's house in Lime Street.

name in the *Daily Courant* said “. . . Dr. Chamberlen one Henry Nevill Payne, and others, pretended themselves as the first Inventors.”

There would seem little doubt therefore that the fourth undertaker was Henry Neville Payne described in the *Dictionary of National Biography* as “conspirator and author.” Lord Macaulay said, rather more mildly, that he had “long been known about town as a dabbler in poetry and politics.”

In December, 1678, “Nevil alias Pain” was arrested and taken before the Committee of Examination of the House of Lords during the enquiry into the Popish Plot. His servant testified that he had heard him speak ill of the King’s affairs and Bedloe (who accused the Queen of being a Papist) informed the Committee that he had several witnesses “that will prove that Nevill said that Mr. Oates and he were only messengers to the Jesuits.” There are however no further entries about Nevill in the Committee’s Minute Book.<sup>1</sup>

After the Revolution he acted as one of King James’s agents and although he had “lost the reputation of an honest man entirely” was successful in persuading Sir James Montgomery that he had been entrusted by King James with the disposal of “money, forces and titles” as he pleased. He was betrayed and arrested when he went to Scotland and even then was looked upon as a “dastardly fellow.” He had the doubtful distinction of being the last person to be tortured in Scotland. He was still in prison, however, as late as December, 1700, when there was a proposal to set him free. What became of him is not known.

The first public intimation that a Penny Post for London was about to be set up was a notice under Domestick Occurrences in the first issue of *Mercurius Civicus* dated Monday, 22nd March, 1679. This paper, one of the Whig newspapers set up by Lord Shaftesbury, stated :—

“We are informed some ingenious persons and good Citizens, for the benefit of the City and Suburbs in point of charge and quick conveyance of Notes and Letters, have projected a method for doing the same throughout for 1d. a

<sup>1</sup>Hist. MSS. Commission, 11th Report, Appendix, Part II.

Letter one with another, further or nearer which may be termed a Footpost, whereof our next may give you more particular account."

The second issue of *Mercurius Civicus*, dated two days later, 28th March, 1679-80<sup>1</sup> continued the story :—

"The Project for Carriage of Town Letters which we mentioned in our last is, as we hear of great charge to the undertakers, and can consequently be of prejudice to none but themselves, since the Publick use is visible to all who know the difference one penny a Letter and the Price they now pay. And it is heartily to be wisht that their Zeal to the publick has not put them upon wrong computations to their future discouragement, that being the common fate of most Ingenious designs."

A few days later one of the opposition newspapers *The True News or Mercurius Anglicus* for 24th-27th March, 1680, reported the starting of the Penny Post :—

"A Project is now setting on foot for conveying of Letters, Notes, Messages, Amorous Billets, and all bundles whatsoever under a pound weight, and all sorts of Writings (Challenges only excepted) to and from any part of the City and Suburbs; to which purpose the Projectors have taken a House in Lime-Street for a General Office, and have appointed Eight more Stages in other parts at a convenient distance."

The report concluded, however, with the sentence "A Plot, if not timely prevented by the Freeman Porters of the City, is like to prove the utter subversion of them, and their Worshipful Corporation." This was the first attack.

Under the date 27th March, 1680, *Smith's Current Intelligence* reported Dr. Oates as saying the penny post was a "farther branch of the Popish Plot." Here was an attack from another quarter. John Smith, the publisher, a Non-conformist bookseller of Great Queen Street, was no supporter of the Catholic cause but equally he was no supporter

<sup>1</sup>New Year's Day was 25th March. It should be remembered therefore, that January and February were at the end of the year not the beginning.

of Shaftesbury's Whig Party. Smith was in fact prosecuted<sup>1</sup> in 1681 by the Whigs for his criticism of the Penny Post. Smith also stated that the Penny Post was the "dextrous Invention of Mr. Henry Nevil, alias Pain, who is notoriously known to be a great asserter of the Catholick cause, and shrewdly suspected to be a promoter of this way of Treasonable Correspondencies."

John Smith's statement about the Penny Post being part of the Popish Plot having been hotly denied by the Whig *Mercurius Civicus*, Smith next reported under the date 2nd April that he did "positively affirm that Oates had made the statement in Whitehall in his (John Smith's) presence and that of at least twenty other gentlemen."

Nathaniel Thompson in his *True Domestick Intelligence* while having no wish to give publicity to the penny post equally had no wish for it to be connected with the "Popish Plot," a plot which the Catholics, of course, denied even existed. He therefore found himself in the position of defending the Penny Post which he must have known was being used against the Catholics. He got over his difficulty by reporting Oates as saying the penny post was "very convenient for all men, especially men of business; for the design will no more serve the Papists to plot, than the Protestants to counter plot them, the advantage being equal." A neat back-handed compliment, but a few days later Thompson was arrested for treason and committed to the Gatehouse.

John Smith also backed the *True News* in trying to stir up the porters against the Penny Post, and reported on 27th March that the porters "have shewed their resentment thereof by taking down and tearing the said tables (hung outside the receiving offices) wheresoever they meet with them." On 27th April *Mercurius Civicus* reported that two porters had been indicted for "Tareing down a label" in Wick Street near St. Clements Church from one of the houses appointed to receive the penny post letters. Both of them

<sup>1</sup>*Index Expurgatorius Anglicanus* by W. H. Hart pages 268-9. Action was taken against Smith in the Mayor's Court in 1681 and he was outlawed. This sentence was annulled in the King's Bench Division in 1684.

were fined, the Court "taking notice of their rude Language as well as their Breach of the Peace."

Still not satisfied with his efforts John Smith stated in his paper that a letter posted at one o'clock in the afternoon was not delivered until five o'clock on the afternoon the next day and the penny post messenger had demanded twopence for it on delivery.

*Mercurius Civicus* excused the Penny Post on the grounds that they had employed a dishonest servant but Smith repeated the whole story among the advertisements in his paper adding "This we think fit to publish to satisfie the world of the great expedition, as well as of the exaction of this pretended Penny Post."

## CHAPTER IV

### THE FIRST PENNY POST

THE exact date on which the Penny Post was first opened was reported in *Smith's Current Intelligence* under the heading of London, March 27th.

"On Saturday last (27th March, 1680) the Projectors for Conveying letters to any part of the City, or Suburbs, for a penny the letter, opened their offices, whereof the three chiefest are in Lime-Street, about Charing-Cross and Temple-bar; besides several inferior Offices; at which they have hung out tables to advertise people of the thing."

*The True News* of the same date reported that in addition to the General Office in Lime Street eight more "Stages" had been appointed in other parts "at a convenient distance."

There is evidence that in spite of the fact that the Penny Post had been well planned and worked out in detail in advance it was set up in a great hurry; further evidence perhaps that it was Whig propaganda money that financed the post.

*Mercurius Civicus* on 6th April published an advertisement which read as follows :—

"The Undertakers for the most Incomparable and Advantageous Design for the Speedy and Safe Conveyance of Letters and Packquets under a pound weight, to all parts of the Cities of London and Westminster, and the Suburbs thereof, finding that their Houses appointed for the Receipt of such Letters are not as yet fully completed, have for the present and farther accommodation of all persons therein, ordered their Messengers to call for all Letters at all Coffee-Houses in the High Roads and Streets following, every hour in some places and an hour and a half in the rest, viz. :—

"From Westminster through the Strand and St. Paul's Church-yard, through Cheapside and Cornhill to Aldgate.

From Ratcliff-cross through the High-way to Little Tower-Hill. And from Ratcliff-cross the Lower way through Shadwell and Wapping to the Hermitage, and so through St. Katherines to the Iron-gate. From St. Georges Church in Southwart to London-bridge; Then from the Bridge, through Grace-Church-street to Shore-ditch Church. Also from St. Giles's through Holborn to the Entrance of Cheapside And lastly in Chancery-lane.

"And all persons, who leave their Letters at any of the places aforesaid, may be sure to have them speedily dispatch'd for

### ONE PENY

"And the Undertakers do intend, in a few days, to settle many more places of Receit for the accommodation of other parts of both Cities and Suburbs."

Our knowledge of the early days of the Penny Post is based largely on a broadside *A Penny Well Bestowed* published by the penny post undertakers in April, 1680. *Mercurius Civicus* for 27th April stated that "Alphabetical Tables" containing a list of all the receiving houses within the Bills of Mortality, were being printed and would be dispersed. None of these lists has ever been found.

*A Penny Well Bestowed* set out the places that the post served as "London and Westminster, and all their contiguous Buildings; also to Wapping, Ratcliffe, Lyme-house, Poplar, and Blackwall; to Redriffe, Southwark and so to Newington and Lambeth; to Hackney, Islington; and all other places within the Weekly Bills of Mortality."

Letters were sent out in the Summer from six in the morning till nine at night, and at "reasonable hours agreeable to the Winter Season." To the more distant places letters went five times a day, i.e., about every three hours. To places of "quick negotiation" within the City and in the "Term time for service of the Law Business" every hour. Even letters delivered after nine in the evening and intended for the General Post Office were forwarded the same night. There were only eight General Post receiving houses<sup>1</sup> in

<sup>1</sup> There were however many unofficial letter receivers, as described in the Introduction.



London between 1677 and 1687 and the penny post acted as an unofficial messenger for people far from one of these General Post receiving houses.

The broadside after answering some of the objections of the Porters whose "Clamours and Riotous Proceedings is a great Scandal to their Society" goes on to list some of the advantages of the Penny Post:—

"All Countrey Gentlemen, Traders, &c. can hereby give notice to Friends of their Arrival in Town.

"Lawyers and Clyents correspond about necessary Occurrences in Law.

"Much time saved in Solicitation for Moneys.

"Easy notice given of all meetings between men of Business at a remote distance.

"Parents may Converse with their absent Children at Boarding-Schools &c.

"Children with their Parents to the Improvement of their Hands, Stile, and Learning.

"Mathematicks, Musick, Singing, Dancing-Masters and Teachers of Languages, to give notice of all disappointments to their Schollers.

"The sick Patients frequently to Correspond with their Doctors and Apothecaries.

"And many more profitable and pleasant uses may be made of this cheap way of Correspondence, too many to ennumerate."

It is interesting to note that this broadside names none of the undertakers. The later broadsides known to have been issued by Dockwra are in a plain matter of fact business style but *A Penny Well Bestowed* is in far more picturesque language, as its title alone indicates. It was perhaps written by Dr. Chamberlen or Neville Payne but who ever it was we may be sure it was no seventeenth century customs searcher who wrote in conclusion "Therefore we shall leave all the Ingenious to find out wherein our invention may be serviceable to them, and refer all people to be convinced by Time and Experience, The True Touch-Stone of all Design."

## CHAPTER V

ROBERT MURRAY'S PENNY POST

**A**CTING on behalf of the Earl of Shaftesbury and the Whigs, Benjamin Harris, editor of the *Domestick Intelligence*, published in October, 1679, Charles Blount's *Appeal from the Country to the City, for the preservation of his Majesty's Person, Liberty and the Protestant Religion*. This *Appeal* was intended to support the claim of the "Protestant Duke" (Charles II's illegitimate son, Monmouth) to the throne. Blount took his readers with him to the top of the Monument which had been erected close to the northern end of London Bridge to commemorate the Great Fire which had destroyed London little more than a dozen years before.

"Imagine you see the whole town in a flame," wrote Blount, "occasioned this second time by the same Popish malice which set it on fire before. At the same instant fancy that amongst the distracted crowd you behold troops of Papists ravishing your wives and daughters, dashing your little children's brains out against the walls, plundering your houses and cutting your own throats by the name of 'heretic dogs.' Then represent to yourself the Tower playing off its cannon and battering down your houses about your ears. Also, casting your eyes towards Smithfield, imagine you see your father or your mother, or some of your nearest or dearest relatives tied to a stake in the midst of flames, where, with hands and eyes lifted up to Heaven, they scream and cry out to that God for whose cause they die, which was a frequent spectacle the last time Popery reigned amongst us."

Blount concluded by attacking the Duke of York as "one eminent great Papist."

It is scarcely surprising that such an attack did not go

unchallenged for long by the King and his brother. Benjamin Harris was tried for publishing the first edition of the *Appeal* but a second edition appeared after his trial in February, 1680. A number of people were arrested for selling and distributing this pamphlet. One of them was Robert Murray, who was arrested in May 1680 with George Cowdron of the "Penny Letter Office." They were both accused by one Stephen Whiteway, "lately a hawker about London," with having induced him in the previous July or August to sell seditious books including the *Appeal*. A warrant for their arrest was issued by the Privy Council on 25th May, 1680, and it was ordered that they be brought before the King in Council.<sup>1</sup>

Murray's arrest probably brought things to a head and William Dockwra with his principal partner out of the way decided to claim the penny post as his own. Dockwra knew that there would come a time when Shaftesbury's purpose had been served and his financial support would be withdrawn. When this time came Dockwra wanted to be in a position to carry on the post on its own merits and saw no reason why he should not have what he hoped would be a successful and profitable undertaking.

Exactly when the break-up of the undertakers' partnership took place is unknown but it was likely in May or June, 1680, for there is a printed extract from a letter<sup>2</sup> written by Hugh Chamberlen to William Dockwra and dated July, 1680, in which he says :—

"What can justify your telling me (after my Name had been tossed about the Town, my Personal Attendance, Time, Interest, Advice, and Reducing your Precipitate Undertakings into some orderly method,) that Mr. ——— failing, under whom I claimed\* my further pretence to any Share, was void; Nor would you then so much as promise me 500*l.* out of the Profits. When I offer'd you to quit all Claim; And yet (out of respect to the Publick Advantage to the Design, and my mistaken Opinion of Your Worth) to give you all reasonable Assistance both by Person and Pen; But above all, what can justifie your barbarous exclusion of Mr. Murray,

<sup>1</sup> *Cal. State Papers (Domestic) Car. II.* 413. No. 121, 124, 125.

<sup>2</sup> British Museum, Harlian MSS. Bagford Collection, 5954.

who was the Original Projector, and the Laborious Manager of the whole Design? Was not He exempted from any Charge in the promoting the Business? was He by Articles oblig'd to bring in another Partner? was it not His being the Projector of it, Consideration enough? and the only Consideration You Voluntarily consented to, and frequently confirm'd, what mov'd You to joyn in Articles with him? which (though never Executed) oblige the Consciences of Honest Men, as much as Law does Knaves upon Seal'd and Deliver'd Deeds; For that which obligeth is Consent express by Words, the Writing is but Evidence of these Words. I have not a Memory to treasure up particulars; But these may be sufficient to rouse up an honest Mind to wipe off those Suspitions, if they be not just Accusations; from which I should be glad if you can vindicate your self, and still deserve the Friendship heretofore readily admitted, By

\*Not expected until they had  
cleared to themselves 5000*l*.

Sir,

Your injur'd Acquaintance,  
H. Chamberlen."

This letter was given by Hugh Chamberlen to Robert Murray to deliver it, if he thought fit, to William Dockwra. It is not known if it was ever sent to Dockwra but Murray published the above extract from it when he dispersed a signed letter<sup>1</sup> at a later date—likely later in 1680—when he was trying to combat the "Scandalous Reflections" of William Dockwra who according to Murray had dispersed letters about the City concerning Murray's undertaking to convey letters and packets.

"It is well known," wrote Murray in his letter, "that I am the Original Contriver, and Author of this way of Conveying Letters and Pacquets, and the first that ever proposed the doing of it; and that upon my Discovery thereof to Mr. Dockwra, He and I entered upon the Performance of it as Partners together; Besides, the same was acknowledg'd by him in the Presence of Dr. Hugh Chamberlen, before the Right Honourable the present Lord Mayor: I do not therefore (as he alledges) set up a new Peny Post, but only con-

<sup>1</sup> British Museum, Harlian MSS. Bagford Collection, 5954.

tinue my own Invention and Method before-practised while Mr. Dockwra and I were together, which I do as my own Right."

Publicly, however, Dr. Chamberlen denied he was one of the Undertakers and towards the end of May, 1680, had an advertisement inserted in the official *London Gazette* to this effect. The advertisement read "Whereas by a mistake Dr Hugh Chamberlen was mentioned in several printed papers, for an undertaker in the Design of the Penny Post, it is desired, that it may be known, that he was not privy to the first putting it into public practice; but was indeed designed for a Trustee to one of the Undertakers, who since proceeds no further in it, which occasioned the said mistake; And further, that Dr John Chamberlen, never had any concern in the thing."

Very little more is known of Murray's post<sup>1</sup> but it is quite certain that he did in fact set up his post as he stated as there is preserved in the British Museum a small printed ticket<sup>2</sup> which reads :—

#### Letters and Pacquets

Not exceeding a Pound Weight, being left at Mr. Hall's Coffee House in Wood-street, are speedily convey'd to all parts within the Bills of Mortality, By Robert Murray, the Inventor, and first Proposer,

#### For One Penny

No more of Murray's post is known but that it existed there can be no doubt. Many writers including Murray's Contemporary, Anthony Wood, gave Murray credit for having invented the Penny Post. Robert Seymour in his *Survey of London and Westminster* published in 1735 gave Murray and Dockwra joint credit for starting the post, but William Maitland in his *History and Survey of London*, published in 1756, says the post was projected by Murray who communicated it to William Dockwra who carried it on for some time with great success.

<sup>1</sup> John Aubrey in a note in his *Brief Lives* says "Mr. Robert Murray began it (the Penny Post Office) in May, 1680."

<sup>2</sup> British Museum, Harlam MSS. Bagford Collection, 5954.

Dockwra who had at one time claimed himself as the "Author" of the penny post later held that who ever had invented it he alone had made a success of it. This was far more like the truth for it was undoubtedly the organising ability of William Dockwra that had brought the London penny post to such a success that it was to last as a separate unit for nearly two hundred years.

According to a statement in the *Daily Courant* of 11th January, 1703, signed by Dockwra, he stated :—

"Whereas a malicious false Report has been industriously spread, That one Robert Murray was the first Inventor of the Penny Post, and that he has been in articles with me William Dockwra, and wrong'd and hardly used: The World is desired to take notice, That as to the first Pretence it is utterly false, for Dr. Chamberlen, one Henry Nevill Payne, and others, pretended themselves the first Inventors; and after I had actually set up the Office, one Mr. Foxley came and shewd'd me a scheme of his concerning a Penny Post, which he had offer'd to Sir John Bennet Post-Master General eight years before I ever knew Murray, but that was rejected as impracticable, as indeed were all the rest of their Notions; nor ever was it by any of them, or any other Person whatsoever, put into any Method to make it practicable, till at my sole Charge and Hazard I begun it in the year 1680."

By September, 1681, Robert Murray had found new employment working for Lord Shaftesbury finding suitable witnesses and paying them to swear as they were directed.<sup>1</sup> One of the witnesses reported that Murray and others told him that "what they did was by the Earl of Shaftesbury's direction. . . . One Norton told him the Parliament would consider him for what he did for the Earl and Dr Oates threatened that, if he did anything for the King, the Parliament would punish him. Murray told him the said Earl did not like the first information against John Smith but liked the last."

A year later Murray was in France. On 27th August, 1682, Lord Preston<sup>2</sup> wrote from Paris to Mr. Secretary Jenkins "Here hath been a little, one Murray, an Agent of

<sup>1</sup> Cal. State Papers (Domestic), Oar. II 416. No. 132.

<sup>2</sup> Hist. MSS. Comm. Vol. 6 pp. 334-6.

my Lord Shaftesbury's for some time about the town; and I am certainly informed he is come with some instructions and has something to do here. I hear that he talks very freely against the Duke and the administration of affairs in England." Lord Preston continued in his letter to say that Murray had been once or twice at his house and he "goes for England soon." He suggested it might be worth while having him searched on his arrival. On 15th September Lord Preston wrote, "Murray is gone from hence a week since." We can only speculate on what happened to Murray on his arrival back in England, for by 30th September Lord Shaftesbury himself was in hiding and fled the Country some six weeks later.

Before long Murray fell on hard times. Dockwra said Murray owed him a hundred and fifty pounds and was ungrateful. "I often bayl'd him to keep him out of prison," stated Dockwra. Ironically enough Murray had written a pamphlet called *An Advertisement for the more Easy and Speedy Collection of Debts*. It is possible that Robert Murray was the Murray later appointed "Register" of Hackney Coaches for in November, 1687, "one Murray pretends to have a grant of the said place." Several objections were made against him and one of his three rivals asked that "Mr. Murray may be laid aside." Four hundred hackney coachmen themselves petitioned the King to appoint another "Register" they having had "sad experience of the false dealing" of Murray.<sup>1</sup>

On 4th August, 1697, a Jos. Blake wrote to Mr. Lownds at the Treasury asking for a recompense for "poor Mr. Robert Murray" for his activities both in the malt and other proposals in Parliament. Murray it would seem had been "in custody in a spongeing house for a month, in the house of one, Armstrong, a bailiff, at the Two Golden Posts, in Boswell Court, behind St. Clement's Church. Murray's "Malt and other proposals" evidently refer to his pamphlets published in 1695 and 1696 which included a National Land Bank (a subject which was the special province of Dr. Hugh Chamberlen), a proposal for "Securing our Wooll against Exportation" and a proposal for "translating the Duty of

<sup>1</sup> *Treasury Books*. Reference Book V, pp 147-9.

Excise from mault-drinks to mault whereby may be advanced to the Crown above 20 millions for carrying on the war against France."

In 1703 Murray had offered the Lord High Treasurer a "scheme for tin."

Some time before July, 1720, a Robert Murray succeeded George Murray as controller and paymaster of the National Lottery and had dealings with the South Sea Company in this capacity in 1721. This Robert Murray was superseded as Lottery Paymaster in 1724 and in February, 1726, was spoken of as the "late Robert Murray, Esq." It is unlikely however, that this is the Robert Murray of the Penny Post.

Dr. Hugh Chamberlen, one of the original undertakers and a close friend of Robert Murray, was famous as a man-midwife and a full account of his life and writings is to be found in Dr. J. H. Aveling's book *The Chamberlens and the Midwifery Forceps*. In March, 1688, Chamberlen was fined £10 on pain of being committed to Newgate for the "illegal and evil practice of medicine." He continued, however, in spite of his political opinions to enjoy the favour of the Royal family and was always selected by King James II to attend his Queen in her confinements.

Chamberlen was a "known Whig who had suffered for his political principles" and in June, 1686, it was considered necessary to issue "A Pardon to Hugh Chamberlain of all Treasons, misprisons of Treason, Insurrection, Rebellions, & other Crimes and Offenses by him committed before the first day of June instant, and of all Indictments, Conviccions, Paines and forfeitures by reason thereof: with such Clauses and non obstantes as are usuall in Pardons of like nature."<sup>1</sup>

His famous Land Bank project occupied him for many years and he issued the first draft of his scheme in November, 1690, under the title *Dr. Hugh Chamberlen's Proposal to make England Rich and Happy*.

In 1702 Chamberlen advocated the union of England and Scotland. He retired to Holland and was still alive there in September, 1720, but it is unknown when he died.

<sup>1</sup> *Dictionary of National Biography*.



## CHAPTER VI

### DOCKWRA CARRIES ON

IT is known that after the arrest of Robert Murray and after Dr. Hugh Chamberlen (and probably Henry Neville) had broken away from the Penny Post in the summer of 1680, Dockwra carried on the undertaking by himself for some six months. Thomas De Laune writing in his *Present State of London* published in 1681 said :—

“ Mr. Dockwra . . . being forsaken by some others soon after it (the Penny Post) began, and left to shift for himself, carried on this Undertaking singly, for above half a year at his own proper charge and hazard, against all the Difficulties, Oppositions and Discouragements that attended it, though now he hath several citizens in partnership with him.”

In the autumn of 1680 the Duke of York made an effort to suppress the penny post on the grounds that it infringed his monopoly. Dockwra accused the Duke of this when he petitioned Parliament in July, 1689, and again in his broadside *The Case of William Dockwra, Mercht. Concerning the Penny Post* published at about the same time.

In this broadside Dockwra stated—“ The late King James, when Duke of York, being prompted by those evil Agents and Officers that were about him, caused Twenty Actions to be brought against him (Dockwra) at one time.

“ Thirteen of the First twenty Actions were brought on to Trial at Westminster, at one and the same Sitting; but so many Declarations appearing to be for the same Fact; and on a Point in Law never determined, on pretence that the PENNY-POST was forbidden by the Act 12 Car. 2 for Erecting One GENERAL-POST-OFFICE. The Court directed a special Verdict upon one of them, and stayed all

the rest. Whereupon Notes were agree'd to in Court, by Council on both sides, and found by the Jury."

Thomas De Laune in his report mentioned above went on to say that many actions (followed by a chargeable Suit of Law) had been brought against Dockwra but "questionless, the Duke is better inform'd now; for it is most certain that this does much further the Revenue of the Grand Post Office, and is an universal Benefit to all the Inhabitants of these Parts: so that whoever goes about to deprive the City of so useful a thing, deserves no thanks from the Duke, nor any Body else, but to be Noted as an Enemy to Publick and Ingenious Inventions."

At the end of 1680 or the beginning of 1681 William Dockwra was joined by his new partners. Their names are unknown and this time Dockwra took care to see that the only name printed on his hand-bills and advertisements was his own.

With his new backers, and presumably his financial problems solved, Dockwra set about planning a greatly improved service for the penny post. Previously only letters and pacquets had been carried, but now in addition parcels up to a pound weight were to be carried for the same charge and were to be insured up to £10 in value. Time postmarks and Paid stamps were also to be introduced. All these improvements were announced to the public by newspaper advertisements, a whole series of hand-bills and a four-page pamphlet called *The Practical Method of the Penny Post* wherein "William Dockwra of London Merchant, and the rest of the Undertakers" announced "such Alterations in their former Methods as will now give Universal satisfaction." This pamphlet was sold by booksellers at a penny but was also given away.

The date on which all these improvements were to come into force was early in April, 1681.

The first announcement appeared in the *True Protestant Mercury* for 26th-30th March, 1681, and in the *Protestant (Domestick) Intelligence* for 20th March and 5th and 8th April, 1681. These advertisements announced the introduction of time stamps and illustrated the paid stamps without

comment, which were to be stamped on all letters. Thomas De Laune, in his *Present State of London* published a few months later (the "Epistle Dedicatory" is dated 24 June, 1681) gave a full description of the penny post and its working obviously based on Dockwra's pamphlet *The Practical Method of the Penny Post* but he also gave a number of additional facts.

Thomas De Laune suggested first that the reader "reject any Intruder that may attempt to set up another Penny-Post" and again that Londoners will "employ the Inventors rather than the Invader, if ever such should be ; and that 'tis much below such a Prince as his Royal Highness is, to desire the Ruine of such a Family." Is this a hint that the Duke of York had threatened to set up a penny post in opposition to Dockwra ? This is the only reference to the matter to be found but there seems no other interpretation that could reasonably be placed upon the words.

Dockwra, it appeared, was now living in Sir Robert Abdy's Lime Street Mansion house where the chief office of the penny post was still kept. There were seven sorting-houses but no indication was given as to where they were situated. Here is Thomas De Laune's description of the penny post :—

"There are seven Sorting-houses, proper to the seven Precincts, into which the Undertakers have divided London, Westminster, and the Suburbs, situated at equal distances, for the better maintenance of mutual Correspondence.

"There are about 4 or 500 Receiving-houses to take in Letters, where the Messengers call every hour, and convey them as directed; as also Post-Letters, the writing of which are much increased by this Accommodation, being carefully convey'd by them to the General Post-Office in Lombard-street.

"There are a great Number of Clerks and poor Citizens daily employed, as Messengers, to Collect, Sort, Enter, Stamp and Deliver all Letters, every Person entertained giving Fifty pounds security, by Bond, for his Fidelity; and is to be subject to the Rules and Orders, from time to time, given by the Undertakers, who oblige them-

selves to make good anything deliver'd to their Messengers under the value of Ten pounds, if sealed up, and the Contents endorsed; And these Messengers have their Wages duly paid them every Saturday night.

“By these are convey'd Letters and Parcels, not exceeding One Pound Weight, nor Ten pound in value, to and from all Parts, at reasonable times, viz. of the Cities of London and Westminster, Southwark, Redriff, Wapping, Ratcliff, Lymehouse, Stepney, Poplar, and Blackwall, and all other places within the weekly Bills of Mortality, as also to the four towns of Hackney, Islington, South-Newington-Butts and Lambeth, but to no other Towns, and the Letters to be left only at the Receiving-houses of those four Towns; but if brought home to their houses, a Penny more in those Towns; nor any letter to be delivered to them in the Street, but at the Receiving-houses.

“All Persons are desired not to leave any Town-Letters after Six of the Clock in the Winter, and Seven in the Summer on Saturday nights, because the many poor men employ'd, may have a little time to provide for their Families against the Lords-day, having no leisure all the week besides.

“Upon three days at Christmas, two days in Easter and Whitsontide and upon the 30 of January, the Penny-Post does not go.

“To the most Remote places Letters go four or five times of the day, to other places six or eight times of the day. To Inns of Court and places of business in Town, especially in Term or Parliament-time, 10 or 12 times of the day. For better information of People where the Receiving-houses are, there are great numbers of Printed Tickets dispersed from time to time amongst the Neighborhood, and Advertisements in the Publick Intelligences, which all concern'd may take Notice of, so that any body may be by the Neighborhood immediately inform'd where a Receiving-house is. Carriers and Stage-Coach Letters are to have Two-pence enclosed to each Carrier or Coachman, because they often reject them for want of money; Hundreds of such being return'd, which any Inquirer may have again upon notice, for they lie Alphabetically disposed of in the Chief Office for that end.

"On all Post-Nights due Care is taken to call for and convey to the General Post-House in Lombard-street all Post-Letters, whether Foreign or Inland, left in any of the Penny-Post Receiving-houses, at or before Nine of the Clock at Night. And I could wish, for encouragement of the Undertakers, that all Persons would so far contribute to the continuance of this useful design, as to send their Post-letters by this Conveyance to the Post-Office in Lombard-Street which they do not Convey by themselves, or Servants.

"If any Post-Letters be left without Money that should pay before-hand, they will be returned to the Office, therefore such as send money, are to indorse the Postage-money upon their Letters.

"Such as inclose Money in Town-letters, are to indorse the true Sum on the Outside, and to tie fast and seal up, under a plain Impression, all Parcels, which may be one way to prevent disputes, in case anything be lost. The Undertakers will not answer for any Contents unseen, unless sealed fast, and the Value Indorsed plain to be Read."

Thomas De Laune answered many complaints of delay and inefficiency, as Dockwra had done in his pamphlet.

*The Practical Method of the Penny Post* concluded by setting out a number of the uses of the penny-post:—"All Gentlemen, Countrey-Chapmen, &c. can presently give Notice of their Arrival to Town.

"Shop-keepers and Trades-men send for what they want to their Work-men.

"Much time saved in solicitation for Money.

"Appointments made among Men of Business.

"Bills disperst for Publication of any Concern.

"Summons or Tickets conveyed to all Parts.

"Brewers Entries safely sent to the Excise Office.

"Lawyers and Clients mutually correspond.

"Patients send to Doctors, Apothecaries, &c. for what they want.

"And," added Dockwra's pamphlet, "The Poor Prisoners can now address to their Creditors or Benefactors for one Penny, and save 5d. to buy them a Dinner."

In the late spring or summer of 1681 Dockwra sent

out printed letters and hand-bills. Two of these letters and five of these hand-bills are preserved today in the British Museum.<sup>1</sup> The hand-bills were printed by Thos. James, the printer of *A Penny Well Bestowed* at the "Printing-press in Mincing-lane." Evidently, however, the rush of Dockwra's publicity was too much for this printer as the printing of *The Practical Method of the Penny Post* was the work of another printer, George Larkin, in Scalding-Alley in the Poultry, who had also printed De Laune's *Present State of London*.

The first printed letter is undated and is addressed from the "Penny Post House Lymestreet." The letter, after pointing out that letters could be sent to the Post Office General in Lombard Street, went on "These are therefore to desire you, as often as you have opportunity, to acquaint your Friends and Neighbours, that Post Letters shall be certainly deliver'd on all Post Nights, for One Penny a letter or Packet, and that such care is taken, by keeping an exact Registry of all such letters in the Penny Post Office, Attested under the hand of the Conveyer, that they are upon all occasions ready to Vouch the Seasonable Delivery of all Post Letters to the Post Office General, in case any question arise thereupon."

The second letter suggested that those bringing letters to London "out of the country or from Foreign parts" should entrust those letters to the penny post for delivery. The letter enclosed a copy of *The Practical Method of the Penny Post* and some hand bills "the former for your own particular use, the latter for such of your Neighbours as they may be most serviceable to, in respect of their correspondence with London."

Four of the bills were of about the same size—about six inches wide and between eight and nine inches deep. The fifth bill is half this size.

The small hand-bill repeated the penny post facilities for taking letters to the General Post Office and also mentions the keeping of the "Exact Registry."

One of the other hand-bills headed "By the Undertakers of the Penny Post" also pointed out the facilities for

<sup>1</sup> Harlian MSS. Bagford Collection, 5954.

delivering letters to the General Post Office, but went on to report that some of the Penny Post Receivers had "appropriated to themselves" the postage money instead of sending it on to the penny post undertakers. "The Undertakers have thought fit," went on the bill, "to discharge such persons from taking in any more letters for the Penny Post, and do hereby give notice that among others they have discharged—and have removed the Receipt of their Penny Post Letters to the House of—where all letters being left, shall be carefully conveyed according to direction for one penny." The "Exact Registry" is again mentioned.

Another bill headed "An Advertisement from the Penny Post Set up for a Publick Good By Mr. Dockwra and Partners in London" again mentions the facilities for delivering "Country Town" letters in London "which letters" said the bill "being sent by their Friends, market People, or any other Conveyance to London, and left (together with a Penny) at any of the Houses appointed to take them in, will go speedily and safely."

A bill headed "Advertisement from the Penny Post" announces that for the future every packet must be "well wrapt up, tied fast, and also sealed, so as it may not be opened without breaking the Seal; which must be always with some impression plain to be seen." The contents or the value had to be legibly written on the outside of the packets.

The bill concluded with the names and addresses of five letter receiving houses "about this neighbourhood." There were a Coffee House, a Cider House, a Milliner, a Grocer and a Mealman; from which it would seem that any supposedly trustworthy person, whatever his business, was appointed a letter receiver for the penny post.

The last bill said that residents living in the "Towns upon the River of Thames" could have their letters given to (or picked up from) the watermen if "plainly directed to the places where they ply." There follows a list of sixteen Thames-side receiving houses from Westminster Bridge to Old Swan in Thames Street, near London Bridge. There were also two houses on the South Bank. Among those listed were a cane-seller, a barber, a semstriss, two cheese-

mongers and a tallow chandler. It is interesting to speculate as to whether the Mr. Blount a bookseller "next the Exchange in the Strand" was the Blount who wrote the notorious *Appeal* for selling which Robert Murray was arrested.

The Earl of Shaftesbury was still backing the Penny Post as is evident from the following extract from *Heraclitus Ridens* (the forerunner of Sir Robert L'Estrange's *Observers*) published 27th December, 1681.

"Oberon King of the Fairies to the Prince of Whigland. A Congratulatory Poem on his happy Restauration, written on the leaves of a Medlar-Tree, and sent by the Penny Post."

Or again in the same newspaper on 1st March, 1681, just a few weeks before Dockwra published his *Practical Method of the Penny Post*.

"Jest reading a Billet per Penny Post.

"Sir,

"You are requested to increase our number with your Divertive Company at the Nuptials to be celebrated between Mr. Popular Fears and Mrs. John Jealousie, two of our faithful Congregational Friends, tomorrow at Sedition-Sellers-Hall, in Common-wealth-lane near Toleration-Street, and to bring this Ticket along with you, which will give you a present and welcome admission to

"Your true Protestant Mercury Friends

"Frau. Smith, Anab. Teacher.

"Manyass. Ben. Harris } Bridemen.  
"Lang. Curtis }

"Well! Certainly this Penny-Post was the most happy invention of this fortunate Age: there was never anything so favourable to the carrying on and managing Intrigue: that and the Press being unpadlockt, are two incomparable twins of the Liberty of the Subject! one may Write, Print, publish and disperse ingenious Libels, either against particular persons



of the Tory party, or the Government itself, and no body the better or the wiser for it . . . ”

Sir Robert L'Estrange in his *A Brief History of the Times* published in 1687 in which he tells the story of the Popish Plot in great detail makes several references to the use made by the Whigs of the Post. Twice he speaks contemptuously of the Whig's "Knights of the Post" and on one occasion refers to the "Coursest of Letter-Carryers" being made the "Confidents of Publique Ministers." This could be a reference to the Earl of Shaftesbury's known association with the Penny Post.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE STAMPS OF THE PENNY POST

TODAY Dockwra's fame among postal historians is due almost entirely to his triangular "Penny Post Paid" stamps, but to Dockwra himself the paid stamps were of secondary importance. These marks were not even mentioned in the *True Protestant Mercury* or in the *Protestant (Domestic) Intelligence* advertisements of March-April, 1681, although the triangular mark was illustrated in the margin. In Dockwra's broadside the *Practical Method of the Penny Post* the triangular stamps were dismissed in two lines with the remark that although each office had its own initial letter the triangular stamps were an acknowledgement that the postage was paid and to "prevent the giving of anything at the Delivery."

Dockwra was far more interested in the introduction of the heart-shaped time stamps. Two of these stamps were illustrated in the newspaper advertisements and in the *Practical Method of the Penny Post*.

"The Undertakers have provided the stamps aforesaid," wrote Dockwra in his broadside, "to mark the Hour of the Day on all Letters when sent out from their Office to be Delivered and all persons are to expect their Letters within one Hour (little more or less from the time Marked thereon), (excepting such Letters as are to the four Out-Towns, and the Remotest Parts which necessarily require a longer time of Conveyance by these they may be able from time to time to discern, whether the delays that hereafter may happen, be really in the office, or in their own Servants (or others,) with whom their letters were left in due time."

In the advertisements the additional fact was recorded that letters were stamped with the time marks "at the time they are given out of their Office for Delivery."

Why, one may ask, was so much attention given to the time marks and so little given to the paid marks? Possibly the latter were not the invention of Dockwra, for several but larger triangular marks are known on letters dated several months earlier than Dockwra's first announcement of the paid stamps.

Writing in the *Philatelist* for June, 1947, Samuel Graveson said :—

"Are the stamps on the British Museum 1680 letters impressions of hand stamps used by Dockwra or someone else?" Mr. Graveson concluded that as there was no record of a competitor of William Dockwra, other than the General Post Office, during the years of 1680-2, these earlier triangular stamps were experimental stamps of Dockwra.

Now, however, that there is ample evidence of the existence of Robert Murray's Penny Post, these earlier triangular paid stamps could very well be not Dockwra's stamps but Murray's stamps. Could we imagine for example these marks being introduced by Murray for use on his own penny post letters. When Murray's post failed—as it must have done—did perhaps Dockwra take over Murray's system and with it the triangular marks? Would this account for Dockwra so quietly passing them into his own penny post system while proclaiming his own stamp invention—the heart-shaped time marks?

The triangular stamps found on letters dated at the end of 1680 differ in many ways from the 1681 Dockwra stamps. The earlier stamps are markedly larger and have the central triangle with its longest side for the base. In the Dockwra stamps the triangle is equilateral. Again the earlier stamps have rounded corners with either a *fleur de lis* or three dots within each corner while the later stamps have "dimpled" corners.

So far seven of the earlier types have been recorded:—

<i>Date</i>	<i>Corner Identification</i>	<i>Centre Letter</i>
13th Dec. 1680	Fleur de Lis	L
21st Dec. 1680	„ „ „	L
8th Jan. 1680-81	„ „ „	L
13th Jan. 1680-81	„ „ „	L
19th Dec. 1680	Three Dots	W
25th Jan. 1680-81	„ „	P
22nd Mar. 1680-81	„ „	L

(This last stamp is of a distinctive type and may have been an experimental stamp leaving a space for the date or time.)

These early paid stamps (with one exception) were all used on letters, so far as present discoveries go, between 13th December, 1680, and 25th January, 1680-81, i.e., in a space of some six weeks. The stamp with the *fleur de lis* corners has so far been recorded only with the centre letter L and the stamp with three dots in the corners only with the centre letter W and P. The L was likely the chief office stamp and the W and P evidently stood for the district offices of Westminster and St. Paul's.

It might be argued that the central initial letters prove the stamps to have been used in Dockwra's office. This, however, is not necessarily true. Robert Murray claimed that he was not setting up a new post but carrying on his own original post, consequently there is no reason why he should not have established his own offices at Westminster and St. Paul's. The L on the early stamps need not in the first place have stood for Lime Street but might have been adopted by Dockwra when he took over the stamps as standing for his chief office. It is a point worth noting that only the chief office was named after a street.<sup>1</sup>

If the earliest triangular paid marks were used by Robert Murray then the initial L might originally have stood for London. On the other hand, Leadenhall Street was only a few yards from Dockwra's house and chief office while Lombard Street, not much further away, was the site of the General Post Office. Both were suitable thoroughfares for

<sup>1</sup> The Three offices named in *Smith's Current Intelligence* 27-30 March, 1680, were Lime Street, Charing Cross and Temple Bar.

Murray's Chief Office. One might add Lincoln's Inn, London Wall, Lothbury or Ludgate.

Robert Murray we know was arrested in June, 1680, and consequently had left Dockwra's post. In the following month Hugh Chamberlen was writing to Murray a letter very critical of Dockwra and had from the context of the letter also left Dockwra. It is not unreasonable to suppose that Murray was trying to run his own penny post for a few months at the end of 1680. The large triangular paid stamps (with a single exception) are all on letters dated in December, 1680, or January 1680-81; and this would be about the most likely period for Murray to have been trying to set up his post.

There are many references to be found (most with obviously inaccurate dates) stating that Murray assigned his post to Dockwra.

It would seem most likely that before Dockwra established his reorganised post at the beginning of 1681 (i.e., the end of March 1680-81) he would have endeavoured to take over Murray's opposition post. We never hear again of Murray's post and so far as is known Murray never asked for a pension or compensation for the loss of his post and the Duke of York took no further proceedings against Murray as he undoubtedly would have done had Murray continued to operate his penny post.<sup>1</sup>

A further point in favour of the early stamps having been used by Murray is the use of the *fleur de lis*. The *fleur de lis* (apart, of course, from France) is particularly associated with Scotland and Murray, whose father was a Scotsman, may well have adopted this emblem for his stamps. A further point is that Murray, Lord Elibank, a Scottish nobleman of this period had as the Ordinary of his coat of arms the *Tressure* which is flowered and counterflowered with *fleur de lis*. It must be admitted, however, that this bearing is frequently to be found in Scottish heraldry and is to be found in the royal shield of Scotland.

A single large *fleur de lis* occurred in the arms of the London Guild of Parish Clerks and it is possible that either

<sup>1</sup> *An Answer to a Case*, stated that "no farther proceedings were (taken) in the Action against Mr. Murray."

Murray or Dockwra may have chosen this emblem as representing the parishes which the penny post served.

The Roundles on the coat of arms of Sir J. Docwra, Lord Prior of St. John's Priory and a possible ancestor of William Dockwra, have a peculiar resemblance to the "three dots" type of corner.

The "three dot" type stamp of 22nd March, 1680-81 (the latest date so far recorded) has the upper part of the triangle (containing the letter L) divided from the lower. This stamp being unlike any of the others may have been some kind of experimental stamp, possibly made by Dockwra in an effort to combine the time and paid stamp by leaving a space for stamping or writing the hour, when the letter was sent out, in the vacant space in the lower portion of the triangle.

Not all letters were, however, stamped with the paid stamps. At least one letter (unfortunately undated) is known with a manuscript "post pd. 1d" but no handstruck paid mark. It is worth noting that most of the known letters with handstruck paid marks also have a manuscript addition denoting that the penny postage had been paid.

Of the later and undoubted Dockwra marks that came into use in March, 1681, there are only six known. The earliest is on a letter dated 18th July, 1681, and the latest 27th June of the following year. Three initial letters, L, W and T have been recorded, presumably indicating Lime Street (Chief Office), Westminster and Temple offices. The list is as follows :—

<i>Date of Letter</i>	<i>Central Letter</i>	<i>Time Mark</i>
18th July 1681	W (Westminster)	Af. 3
9th Dec. 1681	W (Westminster)	—
4th May 1682	L (Lime Street)	—
22nd May 1682	L (Lime Street)	Mor. 8
27th June 1682	T (Temple)	Af. 6
(on undated piece)	W (Westminster)	

The heart-shaped time marks are only known used in conjunction with the paid marks used by Dockwra. As has been recorded above a total of thirteen handstruck triangular

paid marks has been recorded for the period between the beginning of 1680 and the end of 1682 when the Government took over the penny post. Seven of these were discovered in the British Museum by the late E. S. Gladstone, the author of *Great Britain's First Postage Stamp*, published in 1924. Two more are in the collection of Robson Lowe of London, one each in the collections of Gordon Bailey, of Newdigate, Surrey; Charles Meroni, of Chicago; and Foster Bond, of Seaton, Devon. The last example is on a small piece only of the original letter. The Historical MSS. Commission recorded in their 10th Report a letter in the papers of Capt. Stewart, of Llandyssil, Wales, bearing a Dockwra 'paid' stamp.

## THE STAMPS OF THE PENNY POST 1680-1682



Type 1



Type 2

Stamps of either William Dockwra's London Penny Post or Robert Murray's London Penny Post 1680—1680-1.

Type 1 with the letter L in centre (probably for the Chief Office) and Type 2 with initials W or P for the sub-offices of Westminster and St. Pauls. Centre letters S (Southwark), T (Temple), H (Hermitage) have not yet been recorded but are likely to exist.

1 penny black (Type 1)	Earliest date recorded 13th December 1680 Latest date recorded 13th January 1680-1
1 penny black (Type 2)	Earliest date recorded 19th December 1680. Latest date recorded 25th January 1680-1





Six examples only (one on an undated piece) of the above stamps have so far been recorded. The use of these stamps was first announced by William Dockwra in March, 1681. Dockwra's post was closed down in November, 1682, but restarted the following month under control of the General Post Office.

## CHAPTER VIII

### DOCKWRA'S POST IN 1682

THERE is little known of Dockwra's post in 1682, although three letters dated during this year have been found stamped with his 'paid' mark.

Edward Chamberlayne in his *Angliæ Notitia* or *The Present State of England*, the 11th Edition of which was published in 1682, gives a description of the Penny Post in that year. William Dockwra is described as "that ingenious and knowing Citizen of London," but the description is little different from De Laune's of the previous year.

Some time in 1682 Thos. James,<sup>1</sup> Dockwra's Mincing Lane printer, was asked to print a more up to date edition of Dockwra's pamphlet, re-entitled at some length, *The Practical Method of Conveyance of Letters, Returns of Answers, Replies, etc. the same day within the Weekly Bills of Mortality; Commonly called, The Penny Post.*

The post would seem to have been carried on much as previously. "Parcels of very great Bulk (tho' under a pound weight) such as great Band-boxes and other bulky luggage" were to be refused by the Penny Post. The facilities for collecting letters for the General Post Office were mentioned and the public warned against "Bell-men and other obscure persons." Complaints of delay and miscarriage were answered at great length and the conveniences as before were listed,

The pamphlet gave some interesting news about the law suits which were to be brought against Dockwra.

"Now forasmuch as there is a Trial at Bar appointed

<sup>1</sup>There is only one copy of this pamphlet known and it is in the Guildhall Library, London. The name of the printer has been cut off but the decoration round the initial letter is exactly the same as the one used by Thos. James for *A Penny Well Bestowed*.

this Michaelmass Term to decide this Cause, the Undertakers cannot doubt of being delivered from the hardships they groan under, when the true Merits of the Cause shall be thoroughly understood on a fair Hearing, by an honest understanding English Jury, and by the learned, upright and honourable Judges. And they hope that God in his providence will so bless the good intentions of the Undertakers with the peaceable Enjoyment of their own Chargeable Invention, that they may find encouragement for their real Service to the Publick: Innocence and Integrity being naturally confident of a Reward.

“ It is become a general wonder among the most Intelligent and Men of Business, That Mr. Dockwra (or any other) should be thus Sued for Carrying and Re-carrying Letters about London and other Neighbouring Places, when to this day the General Post has not settled anything of that nature for the conveniency of the Inhabitants in any one place round this City nearer than a Stage of 9 or 10 mile; and yet the Informant is for Penalties of £5 a Letter and £100 a Week for doing that good to the Publick which the General Post Office never did. And by this invention has so added to the income of the Post Office, that it was never before so high as since the Penny-Post was set up; that Revenue being now risen from £21500 to above £50000 per Annum, though the poor Undertakers of the Penny-Post have lost above £1000 per Annum out of purse to serve the Publick. But they hope they shall be at quiet in the possession of their own Invention, and that they may be countenanced to carry on the Practice of the Penny-Post whereby they may be enabled to reap the Fruits of their Labour (and great Charge) as a Reward for setting up an Undertaking Manifested to be so useful to all Men, by full Experience, The True Touch-Stone of all Designs.”

Dockwra continued to show confidence in his eventual victory although strong forces were combining against him. The rule of the all-powerful Whigs under the Earl of Shaftesbury was rapidly coming to an end. In November, 1681, Shaftesbury had narrowly escaped the wrath of the Tories. He was tried in London, but if he could have been

tried in Oxford instead, his end would have been even more rapid. London was still self-governing and the Whig sheriffs, who appointed the juries, virtually ruled the city. In the summer of 1682 the Tories forced the election of two of their own followers as sheriffs of London. In the late summer and autumn of 1682 Shaftesbury and his followers planned an insurrection and the assassination of Charles and James. But the power of the Whigs was already at an end. In September a Tory Lord Mayor and Sheriffs were elected for London and a few weeks later Shaftesbury, fearing for his life, fled to Holland.

The packed juries which had saved Dockwra when the Duke of York first tried to put down the penny post were now of no avail and however confident Dockwra may have appeared on the surface he must have known that the action pending against him could have only one result.

In November, 1682, Dockwra issued a small hand-bill headed *Advertisement from the Undertakers for Conveyance of Letters for a Penny a-piece within the Weekly Bills of Mortality*. This hand-bill recorded that "one Mr. John Hulke" had started several actions against the penny post undertakers. One of the actions was to be tried at the Kings Bench Bar in Westminster Hall on 22nd November, 1682. Damages of £5,250 were claimed and all the clerks and many of the messengers had been subpœnaed.

"These are therefore to give notice," went on the hand-bill, "that this proceeding hath necessitated the Discontinuance of their Clerks and Messengers Attendance Tuesday and Wednesday next, because of their preparing for and attending on that Trial."

Dockwra promised that so soon as the trial was over the penny post would continue, but as had been obvious from the very beginning, the penny post under Dockwra was never to re-open.

In the printed petition<sup>1</sup> already quoted Dockwra stated—"The Council for the said Dockwra again insisted on a special verdict, (as he had been able to do two years

<sup>1</sup> *The Case of William Dockwra Mercht. Concerning the Penny Post*, Published about 1689.

previously) as the Right of the Subject (and as was formerly directed) to the end, the said matter of Law might be fully argued and legally Determined (as it ought to have been) but then could not obtain the same. But the Jury being directed to find a General Verdict, by colour thereof; he (Dockwra) was deprived of the Penny Post."

Dockwra seems to have got off with a fine of a £100 for contempt of Court but his post was no more.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE POSTMASTER GENERAL TAKES OVER THE PENNY POST

LORD ARLINGTON, the Postmaster General, was quick to act. He saw no reason for destroying so useful (and by now profitable) an undertaking as the penny post. While Dockwra was busy petitioning the Duke of York the "Agents and Officers" of the General Post Office were "by Threats to some and great Promises to others" obtaining from Dockwra's clerks copies of his "Schemes, Methods and Rules." Most of Dockwra's clerks, messengers and receivers went over to the new penny post "being in fear of those Actions Wherewith they were threatened to be ruined, and terrified by the great Power they were under; durst do no other than forsake the said Dockwra's Employment."

A day or two after Dockwra had been deprived of his post there appeared a notice in the official *London Gazette* for 23rd-27th November, 1682 :—

"Whereas there hath been a Verdict lately obtained at the King's Bench-Bar, against Mr. Dockray, the Undertaker of the Penny-Post Office, whereby it is adjudged that such matters are under the Post-Master-General, Established by Act of Parliament: These are to give notice, (for the accommodation of all persons) That a Penny-post shall be forthwith erected within the Bills of Mortality, to be managed by Officers appointed for that purpose: And all persons lately employed in Managing, Receiving, and Carrying the said Penny-Post Letters are desired to repair to Mr. Frowde, at the General Post-Office in Lombard Street, there to receive farther Direction in this affair."

A few days later an advertisement in the same newspaper, dated 30th November-4th December, 1682, stated

that "the Penny Post will be set up again on Monday, the 11th Instant." Londoners were invited to use the same Receiving Houses as formerly.

The Government Penny Post seems to have been carried on along the same general lines as had been laid down by Dockwra. The chief office was set up in St. Michaels-Alley in Cornhill and letters and parcels as before up to a pound in weight and £10 in value were conveyed to places within five miles of London. The staff of the penny post had all given "Bonds and security for their Fidelity." While Dockwra had closed his post on all the usual holidays the Government decided to keep it open at Easter and Whitsuntide.

In the *London Gazette* for 18th-22nd and 22nd-24th December, 1684, there was given the first list of penny post offices so far known :—

Principal Office—Crosby-House in Bishopsgate Street<sup>1</sup>  
 St. Paul's Office—Royal Bagnio Coffee House in Newgate Street  
 Temple Office—Chichester Rents in Chancery Lane  
 Westminster Office—Chequer Court near Charing Cross  
 Southwark Office—New Buildings in Fowlane near the Borough  
 Ratcliffe and Hermitage Office—Little Tower Hill.

The Government Penny Post adopted triangular paid stamps<sup>2</sup> very similar to those of Dockwra but his heart shaped time stamps were abandoned in favour of circular ones which also included the initial letter of the office at which they were used.

In 1690 a new edition of the late Thomas De Laune's *Present State of London* "continued to this present year by a carefull hand," reported on the progress of the penny post. The post was now extended to any part of London or "any of the Towns or Villages round about it, for 15 miles compass, and upwards." A very similar description appeared in

<sup>1</sup> The first Chief Office, in December 1682, was in St. Michaels Alley, Cornhill.

<sup>2</sup> The Government paid stamps had the point of the triangle downwards.

the following year in *The New State of England, under their Majesties K. William and Q. Mary* by G. Miegge.

A Treasury warrant dated in December, 1687, listing a number of "dead or desperate" Penny Post debts which for one reason or another were being written off as irrecoverable, throws an interesting light on the times.

These debts run from 11th December, 1682 (the first day of the penny post under the General Post Office) to 1686.

The debts range from a few pence to several pounds and while they mostly relate to Penny Post Receivers, there are listed among the defaulters, messengers, collectors and even a sorter "gone off poor."

Many of the debtors are described as "gone, none knows whither." Others had "Gone to Ireland," "Gone into Wales," "Gone to Jamaica" and one, a printer in Gracechurch Street, "Gone to Pennsylvania."

A Public Notary at Redriff Wall was described as "poor" and unable to pay for 15 letters, while a barber at the Dog's Head, who was likewise poor is recorded as owing for 16 letters.

Hall, a Greenwich messenger, owed for 687 letters and had "run away and his security worth nothing." A toyseller in Wallbrook had "gone off into the country."

Victuallers and Coffeemen are common occupations of the letter receivers but among their out of the way occupations may be noticed a translator in Poplar, and another in Sheene, a buttonseller in Paternoster Row and a fringemaker against Durham Yard.

A messenger called Fleetwood collected the postage on over a thousand letters from half a dozen receivers and was reported as "run away with the money and his security worth nothing." Another debt (for 105 letters) is written off as "paid to Moor the messenger, gone for a Trooper, his security gone to Ireland." Several Receivers had "gone for a soldier."

Powde, a receiver in the famous Bagnio Coffeehouse in Newgate Street and two receiver coffeemen, one in Castle Alley and the other in Bridgefoot, are all reported as in the



Mint, Southwark, the notorious debtors' refuge of those days.

Few of the defaulters owed for more than a few hundred letters but one receiver, Moore, a turnkey in the King's Bench, had failed to pay for 3,688 letters. The terse report "dead and desperate" no doubt referred to the debt and not to the turnkey!

This list is also of interest in showing how far out of London the penny post extended. Receivers were located in Sheene, Richmond, Brentford, Chiswick, Thistleworth, Rickmansworth, Harrow-on-the-Hill, Pinner, Uckbridge, Carshalton, and Mitcham.

Another point of interest that emerges from this warrant is that letter receivers kept the penny postage on one letter in ten as their commission. The country messengers, according to a report of the Postmaster General in 1702, were originally permitted to keep the extra penny paid on delivery as part of their wages but from 1687 these messengers were paid a fixed wage and the extra penny became part of the Penny Post revenue.

A Proclamation for enforcing the Act of Parliament for settling the Profits of the Post Office on the Duke of York was issued at Windsor, 25th August, 1683. In this Proclamation the carrying of letters, except by the General Post Office, was forbidden. A foot-post, such as Dockwra's was expressly prohibited.

At the very beginning of the Proclamation it was stated that :—

"Several persons, for their private lucre, have lately practised and do still continue in a secret and most unlawful manner to make a general collection of letters and to give them conveyance and delivery for hire, without any authority from the Postmaster General, whereby . . . several dangerous correspondencies are maintained, and the seditious designs of many evil disposed persons, and the treasons of the late conspirators are very much promoted."

Was Dockwra slow to give up running a post after his original Penny Post had been taken from him? A very

similar Proclamation was issued by James as soon as he was King and dated 7th September, 1685.

The Penny Post was not run under the authority of law until the passing of the Act of 1711. By this Act letters were to be received and delivered by the Penny Post within "ten miles distant from the General Letter Office."

Fred. J. Melville in his *Origins of the Penny Post* quoted a letter from a M. Ces'ar de Saussme written while visiting England. The letter, dated 29th October, 1726, from East Sheen, nr. Richmond, after describing the London Penny Post of that time says "You may, if you wish it, write twice a day to anyone living in the town and once a day to about one hundred and fifty small towns and villages in the vicinity of London. Whatever is sent by the 1d. post is well cared for, provided you have taken the trouble of registering it at the office, because, should the parcel get lost, the clerk is in that case answerable for it."

A decade later Robert Seymour's *Survey of London and Westminster* stated that there were "above 600 housses that receive for the Penny-Post, there being one in most great streets; at the Door or Window of which is commonly hung up a printed Paper in a Frame, with these Words in large Letters, PENNY-POST LETTERS AND PARCELS ARE TAKEN IN HERE."

William Maitland in his *History and Survey of London* published in 1756, reported that there were "upwards of two hundred Towns and Villages, where Penny-Post Letters and Parcels are taken in."

By the Act of 1765 the weight of penny post letters, packets or parcels was reduced to 4oz. Little by little the penny post was stagnating and its earlier efficiency under Dockwra and even in the early days under the General Post Office was a thing of the past. George Brumell in his *Local Posts of London* recorded a letter written in 1765 to the *St. James' Chronicle* complaining that letters from Hammer-smith were left at Kensington for an old woman to distribute: "sometimes she is washing, sometimes asleep, and after two hours delay she deputes a Poorhouse boy, who can read no more than herself. Instead of arriving twice a day, letters

come once: instead of at noon not till 10 at night, dirty and torn."

The Penny Post was described in *London and its Environs Described* (1761) and in the *London Street Directory* of 1793. *Cary's Pocket Map of London* (1792) gives a list of Receiving Houses.

And so the Penny Post drifted on until nearly 114 years after it was started by Dockwra it was reorganised by a letter carrier named Edward Johnson who has been called a second Dockwra.

The improvements were forecast in an article in the *Sun* for 27th February, 1794, and in the same newspaper for 9th June there appeared an announcement of the new regulations dated two days earlier and signed by the Secretary to the Post Office, Anthony Todd.

The Act of 1794 made prepayment optional, except for letters for the General Post. Letters *from* the country were now charged the extra penny that had previously been paid only on letters *to* the country, and the Penny Post was to be extended to places more than 10 miles from the General Post Office at the discretion of the Postmaster General. Richmond, Petersham, and Ham were included under this provision in the following July.<sup>1</sup>

The five district offices (the St. Paul's and Temple offices had been replaced by a single office at St. Clements, in Blackmore Street about 1670) were reduced to two. The Chief office was in Lombard Street and the Westminster office in Gerrard Street, Soho. The Southwark, St. Clements and Hermitage offices were closed down.

Seven years later, on 5th April, 1801, the Penny Post became the Twopenny Post but continued as before apart from the increase in rate. The charge for letters sent by the twopenny post was reduced again to a penny when Rowland Hill's penny postage reforms were introduced in January, 1840, but the name Twopenny Post remained until 1844 when it was renamed the London District Post. It was, however, still a separate undertaking distinct from the General Post Office and had its own staff of blue uniformed letter

<sup>1</sup>*Sun* 8th. July, 1794.

carriers (to distinguish them from the G.P.O. scarlet). In 1855, however, the separate post for London letters was abolished and the final link with Dockwra's post of a hundred and seventy-five years before came to an end.

## CHAPTER X

### DOCKWRA AFTER HIS PENNY POST

WHEN William Dockwra lost the legal action brought against him by the Duke of York in November, 1682, his Penny Post was closed down. Dockwra (as he said in one of his later broadsides<sup>1</sup>) "immediately made his Application for Relief, by several Petitions to the said Duke, but was delayed Answer, until his (the Duke's) Agents and Officers had accomplished their Designs." Dockwra must have known what the Duke's answer would be before he made his petition and by the time he did get an answer the Duke of York had seen to it that the Penny Post had been taken under the care of the General Post Office.

William Dockwra now knew that his case was without hope—at least while James, Duke of York, had any say in the matter. These were the days of the notorious Judge Jeffreys and no doubt Dockwra thought it good policy to hold his tongue, or rather his pen, for the present.

Charles II died on 6th February, 1685, and James came to the throne. In May, Titus Oates was tried for perjury and sentenced to be flogged through the London streets, an ordeal which he somehow managed to survive. Monmouth's Rising took place in the summer and culminated in the Battle of Sedgemoor on 6th July and the famous Bloody Assize of Judge Jeffreys the following September.

On 5th November, 1688, William of Orange landed at Torbay and marched triumphantly and unopposed to London. In the following month James abdicated and went to Paris, and on 13th February, 1689, William and Mary were together proclaimed rulers of Britain.

<sup>1</sup>*The Case of William Dockwra Mercht. Concerning the Penny Post*, published about 1689.

Dockwra lost no time and immediately submitted a new petition to the House of Commons. This petition, in which Dockwra claimed he was out of pocket £8,000 in setting up the Penny Post, was read on 1st July, 1689, and it was resolved that his petition be referred to the Committee on the Bill for settling the Revenue. At this time Dockwra had printed and distributed his petition in the form of a large broadside (already mentioned several times) under the title of *The Case of William Dockwra Mercht. Concerning the Penny Post*. Very shortly afterwards an anonymous sheet was published with the title *An Answer to a Case to Several Members of this Honourable House by Mr. William Dockwra Mercht. Concerning the Penny Post*. This sheet tried to prove that Dockwra had in fact no new invention (as he claimed) in his original penny post but had founded it on exactly the same lines as the General Post. Whoever the author was, he was no friend of Dockwra's. Dockwra hurried out *An Advertisement on the behalf of William Dockwra, Mercht. Concerning the Penny Post*, in August, 1689. The copy of this broadside in the Bruce Castle Museum is dated in manuscript "London Printed August 28 LXXXIX" and Anthony Wood said of it "This paper was dispersed in every coffee-house in Oxon in the beginning of September, 1689." The copy which he had noted had been inscribed at the foot "The Reader is desired not to take away this paper."

In this broadside Dockwra attacked the author of the anonymous *Answer* to his *Case* saying that the whole case was put in a false light. Dockwra went on, "Now whereas the said Dockwra, had prepared a *Reply* to that pretended *Answer*, which he had by him ready to wash off the Varnish of that officious Undertaker . . . The Parliament adjourned, before the Revenue was settled; so that the said Dockwra's case came not on to a Hearing this Session, for which Reason, he did not think fit to print his *Reply*."

Although Dockwra speaks of the author of the *Answer* as "some Unnamed Person" he later described him as "that officious Undertaker." If Dockwra was referring to one of his former partners (who might quite likely see no reason

why Dockwra alone should have compensation for loss of the Penny Post) we are left to conjecture whether the "officials undertaker" was Robert Murray, Dr. Hugh Chamberlen or another partner whose name is now lost to us.

Dockwra advised his readers that he had met with no "discouragement from Parliament" but there would seem little doubt that he was worried. However, Dockwra's petition was considered by Parliament on 22nd April, 1690.

This petition was referred to the Committee on the Bill for the Hereditary Revenue of the Crown. On the 16th May this Committee recommended Dockwra's petition to the King's "Great Wisdom and Justice."

There is in the Public Record Office a manuscript prepared about the spring of 1690 and headed *Some brief memdms. for the Members of the Honble. House of Commons touching the Penny Post*. This manuscript is unsigned but the author is evidently Dockwra, for it asks that the Penny Post be restored to him or failing that he should be given a pension of £1000 a year for twenty-one years. It is pointed out that the revenue was then more than £1,200 a year. Dockwra again points out that he is £8,000 out of pocket over the Penny Post. He values the requested 21 years' pension at "ten years purchase" and points out that at this rate he would have only £2,000 as his reward.

Dockwra was given a pension from the Penny Post Office of £500 a year for seven years to date from June, 1689. Hardly what he had asked for but he would seem to have accepted this amount without complaining.

Some time before April, 1692, William Dockwra had gone into partnership with a Mr. John Green of Cartaret Street "by the Cock-pit Royal" in Westminster with the object of exploiting Dockwra's latest invention—"Easie Coaches." An advertisement "about the Pattent for easie Coaches" was published in the *Athenian Mercury* for 9th April, 1692, under the heading "William Dockwra's Easie Coaches." The Coaches were "so hung as to render them easier for the Passenger, and less labour to the Horses . . . the Coachmen's sitting more convenient and the motion just like that of a Sedan being free from that tossing and joulting to

which other Coaches are liable." Those interested were invited to apply at Mr. Green's house or at Mr. Dockwra's house in Little St. Helen's in Bishopsgate-Street and, not wanting to miss so good an opportunity, Dockwra added his hope that his Partner and he would fare better by this Invention, than he did by setting up the Penny Post.

Dockwra's hopes, however, were not realised for we hear of him in America in the following year. In February, 1692, Thomas Neale, who held a Royal patent to set up posts in North America, appointed a Scot, Andrew Hamilton, as his deputy. In recording this the *American Dictionary of National Biography* says "Hamilton's interest may have been due to his relations with William Dockwra, an East Jersey proprietor, who had established a penny post in London." We know no more of Dockwra's life in America than this brief reference.

Dockwra was mentioned with Richard Povey, Thomas Puckle and Augustin Harris in a warrant issued on March 17th, 1693, for a grant of Letters Patent to them for their invention "of a peculiar art making moulds of iron and other metals" for casting large guns. Later in the same year we find "Richard Povey and Thomas Philips, esquires, and William Dockwra and Thomas Puckle, merchants," applying for incorporation by name of "The Governor and Company for Casting and Making Guns and Ordnance in Moulds of Metal." The petition was referred to the Attorney- or Solicitor-General on August 11th, 1693, but the decision is not recorded.<sup>1</sup>

In the previous year Dockwra had been elected Master of the Armourer's Company and in October, 1695, on the death of Sir Leonard Robinson, William Dockwra was put forward for election as Chamberlain of the City of London. He was not successful on this occasion and neither was he in January, 1703, on the death of Sir Thomas Cudden, when an advertisement of his in *The Flying Post* was headed "Advertisement from William Dockwra, Citizen and Armourer of London, one of the Candidates for the

<sup>1</sup> Harry J. Maguire in *Stanley Gibbon's Monthly Journal* in a series of articles on William Dockwra, July 31, September 30 and October 31, 1907.



Chamberlain's Place of this City." A petition to Queen Anne made in 1708 requesting the grant of a Charter to the Armourers' and Brasiers' Company and bearing Dockwra's signature is still in the possession of the Armourers' Company today.

In Examinations<sup>1</sup> taken before the House of Commons in November, 1694, it was disclosed that Dockwra had been engaged with others in informing against Roman Catholics and sharing in their lands which were forfeited as a consequence. Captain Baker told the Speaker in evidence that he had heard the undertakers had joined together and would be rewarded with one third part of the forfeited lands which they would later divide between them.

Mr. Speaker. Do you know the undertakers' names ?

Captain Baker. I have heard there was one Goddard Stepkyn.

Mr. Speaker. Who employed you in the commission ?

Captain Baker. I was employed by one Dockwra of London and several other gentlemen.

Mr. Speaker. Please to name them.

Captain Baker. My Lord Monmouth was one, Sir Scroope How, Sir J. Guise.

Later in his evidence Captain Baker disclosed that "about 2 or 3 yeares agoe" some gentlemen had made a proposal to make a discovery of "great summes levyed upon dissenters" and not paid into the Exchequer. Several "great summes" were discovered to the value of £20,000.

Mr. Speaker. Who are the undertakers ?

Captain Baker. There was a brother of mine in it, Mr. Dockwra, and one that belonged to Sir William Godolphin.

On 20th March, 1696-7, *The Post Boy* reported, "It is said Mr. Castleton, Comptrouler of the Penny-Post Office is to be removed, and is to be succeeded by Dockwra who was the first projector of that Office." Dockwra received a salary of £200 a year ("Taxt £40 for the Capitation Act") in addition to his pension.

<sup>1</sup> Hist. MSS Commission 14th Report, Appendix, Part IV, MSS of Lord Kenyon, pp. 322-354.

We need not look far for a reason for this change in the Penny Post management. Three days later *The Post Boy* reported "we hear Mr. Sampson, who discovered some Frauds in the Penny Post Office, is to be well rewarded." Would it be unkind to suggest that Mr. Dockwra and Mr. Sampson were close friends?

The next month, however, Dockwra was again petitioning the King for an extension of his pension which was due to expire the following June. The Petition<sup>1</sup> is along the same lines as the earlier petitions and had with it *A Short but true State of the hard Case of Mr. Dockwra that set up the Penny Post Anno 1680 which the late K. James Ravisht from him.* This set out "by way of Accot. of Debtor and Creditor" a statement of the amount Dockwra considered he was out of pocket on account of the penny post.

This statement is inscribed:—

"To Close this Representation

"The sume of this case is this, if Mr. Dockwra had the pension of £500 per annum for ever (being out of its own income) it would never be sold for the money that would repair his loss by two or three thousand pounds but he only petitions for a second 7 years to preserve his family from ruin and throws himself at his Majesty's feet for his future bounty and generosity for his service to the King and Kingdom at the cost of his great labour and care and his children's fortunes."

This petition and the statement are in the Public Record Office and the petition is endorsed under date 20th April, 1697, "To be continued for 3 years longer."

Little is known of Dockwra's four years in charge of the penny post from the end of 1696 to 1700. In the British Museum is a letter which Dockwra wrote on 25th April, 1698, to a Mr. John Houghton an "Apothecary at ye corner of East-cheap in Grace-church-street." The letter, dated from the Chief Penny Post Office refers to "townes and places that are taken off from the Penny-Post, decreasing its Revenue,

<sup>1</sup>To the King's most Excellent Majesty, *The Humble Petition of William Dockwra of London, Merchant* in the Public Record Office, Treasury Papers (T.1.) Vol. 44, No. 56.

and abateing the peoples conveniences in hopes of adding more profit to the Generall Post." The letter is signed by Dockwra who describes himself as "Author of the Penny Post."

In August 1698, we find a Mr. Bauden complaining to the Treasury of Dockwra's mismanagement of the penny post. Dockwra was ordered to "make answer in writing : then my Lords will hear both sides."

The *London Post* for 25th-28th August, 1699, reported that Dockwra had had a "full hearing" and that many of the charges were "plainely proved upon him." The following day *The Flying Post* denied the *London Post* report was true saying, "there was not one dishonest Action proved against Him."

"The officers and messengers of His Majesteys penny post office" were determined to have no more of Dockwra and made out a strong case against him which was submitted to the Treasury. Under date of 29th June, 1699, the case against Dockwra was sent in a letter to the "Post Mr. Genll. to examine ye allegacons and report."

One of the Petitions, that for February, 1699-1700, asked for Dockwra's removal "as he was so irregular, vexatious and troublesome, and not fit to be any longer borne with."

The joint Postmasters-General, Sir Robert Cotton and Sir Thomas Frankland, examined the charges against Dockwra and made a long report to the Treasury who reported on 19th May, 1700, "My Lords are of opinion that Mr. Dockwra is not fit to be entrusted in the office any longer."

And so in June, 1700, Dockwra was dismissed from the Penny Post and Nathaniel Castleton was restored to his old position.

At this time the Earl of Oxford asked for a lease of the Penny Post Office at a rent of £100 a year saying he would also take over Dockwra's pension. This memorial is endorsed "Read 25 June 1700. It cannot be granted." A like proposal to farm the post had also been turned down in the previous year.

Dockwra had lost his managership of the Penny Post and was now likely to lose his pension which had expired in mid-summer 1700.

This time Dockwra wrote and signed his petition<sup>1</sup> which was addressed to the Lords of the Treasury. This petition is undated but was written during the latter part of 1700. Dockwra recapitulates the position and requests his pension to be continued as he is "above sixtie years of age." The document is endorsed 17th December 1700. "Read to the King. The King is not willing to Grant the Pension. But will employ him in Business when an Imployment doth fall that he it fitt for."

In January, 1703, Dockwra was still fighting what he termed "malicious false and scandalous" reports. In a signed advertisement in the *Daily Courant* for 11th January, 1703, he denied that Robert Murray had been the first inventor of the penny post. On the following day, in another advertisement in the same newspaper, he denied he had been removed from the Penny Post management because of "Injuries done to the Subject."

In 1704 there were recorded in the Parish Register of St. Thomas The Apostle the Baptisms of three children, Thomas, Jacob and Ann, who would seem likely to have been Dockwra's grand-children. Dockwra now an ageing man gave up his fight against the authorities and all who abused him. Gently he fades from the scene. We catch a glimpse of him living in the London parish of St. Mary Aldermary in June, 1709, and then we hear no more of him until his death is recorded on 25th September, 1716. *The Weekly Journal* recorded his passing in these words "Mr. Dockwra, frequently said to be the first Projector of the Penny-Post, is dead, at near a 100 years of Age." In the same month the *Political State of Great Britain*<sup>2</sup> stated "about this Time died Mr. Dockwra, the first Inventor of the Penny-Post Office, being near a Hundred Years of Age." These reports, however, were a slight exaggeration, as on

<sup>1</sup> *The Humble Petition of William Dockwra of London, Merchant*, in the Public Record Office, London.

<sup>2</sup> London, published 1716 Vol. XII p. 291.

Dockwra's own showing in his petition he was "above sixtie" in 1700 so could have been no more than eighty at the most when he died.

*The Annals of King George*<sup>1</sup> under "Persons of Note Dead this Year" recorded his death in September in these words "Mr. Dockwra, called Penny-Post Dockwra, aged Ninety Four, and read the smallest Print without Spectacles to the last."

<sup>1</sup>London, Published 1718 Vol. III p. 302.