

NOTES FROM THORNHAM

Post Bus: Diss and Gislingham via Thornham

Post Buses were run by the Royal Mail to carry passengers and post in remote areas with little public transport. Our route was one of eight in East Anglia. It followed its meandering route from 1974 when our MP, Sir Harwood Harrison, welcomed it for the 'mobility it brought to the old and to housewives whose husbands drove to work in the family car'. To the regret of passengers and drivers it closed in 1985 when Suffolk County Council withdrew funding.

Post Buses have run on a total of 289 routes, although not all operating at the same time as some had closed before the final ones opened in 2001. Today there is only one, in the far north of Scotland.

On 26th March 1990 our route's 16th birthday was celebrated with a re-run in a Post Bus restored by David Cott and driven by Bob Ward, who recently wrote the following article for the Starston *Pigeon Post*.

“ Some 35 years ago when I was just a 'Boy Postman' not only was I a postman I was also a bus driver – of a Royal Mail Post Bus. A Post Bus would deliver mail to a district, then collect from post boxes and post offices on a route back to its base, whilst also picking up fare paying passengers on that route in the morning. Then in the afternoon it would go back over the route carrying back passengers and performing a second delivery (remember that?) over the last part of the route. And lastly perform a shorter collection on its way back into Diss. The delivery was known as 'Gislingham', and started in 1974.

Our daily routine was start at Diss at 5 am and collect bags of mail for Gislingham, Eye, Thorndon, Stoke Ash, and Occold, drive out to Eye Post Office where you would prepare your delivery alongside three other postmen in a back room. Then off to deliver Thornham Parva and

Thornham Magna. Drop the mail for Wickham Skeith at Thornham Magna Post Office for Cathy Mayes who would cycle from Wickham Skeith at 6.30 to sort it and cycle back to deliver. Then off to Gislingham for the remainder of your delivery, you had to be finished and back at Gislingham Post Office, ready for your bus route to leave at 10.30.

The route would involve a post office/letter box collection and pick up



Bob Ward at the wheel, c1980

passengers who could go village to village, or all the way to Diss, via post offices in Gislingham, Thornham Magna, Wickham Skeith, Thwaite, Stoke Ash, Rishangles, Thorndon, Bedingfield, Occold, Eye, Oakley and Diss. Of those just Stoke Ash, Eye and Diss are left. All those bar Thwaite and Eye and Diss were also village shops.

In March 1980 the Royal Mail commissioned a souvenir post card which had a special first day issue on 25th March. The young handsome driver (that's not a misprint) was asked to drive the bus for the photo shoot and was even paid a £5 'modelling fee'. There were cynics at work who said I should have paid them! I also happened to be driving when Anglia TV asked to film a report on rural



*Ticket and
timetable
from
David
Cott's
collection*

Diss - Eye - Gislingham
Post Bus
weekday service



	Depart to Diss P.O. Mon-Sat. a.m.	Depart to Diss P.O. Mon-Fri. p.m.
Gislingham P.O.	10.10	4.30
Thornham Magna P.O.	10.20	4.35
Wickham Skeith P.O.	10.25	4.40
Thwaite P.O.	10.30	4.50
Stoke Ash School	10.35	—
Stoke Ash P.O.	10.36	4.55
Thorndon P.O.	10.45	—
Rishangles War Memorial	10.50	—
Bedingfield P.O.	10.55	—
Bedingfield Village	10.58	—
Occold P.O.	11.00	—
Eye P.O.	11.15	5.25
Brome School Post Box	11.25	—
Oakley P.O.	11.30	—
Oakley Post Box	11.35	—
Diss Railway Stn. Bridge	11.58	—
Diss Bus Station	Noon	—
Diss P.O.	12.05	5.40

For conditions of travel apply to
Driver or to Head Post Office, Norwich.
THESE SERVICES WILL NOT OPERATE ON BANK HOLIDAYS



	Depart to Gislingham P.O. Mon-Fri. p.m.
Diss P.O.	1.30
Diss Bus Station	1.45
Diss Railway Stn. Bridge	1.47
Oakley Post Box	2.00
Oakley P.O.	2.05
Brome School Post Box	2.10
Eye P.O.	2.15
Occold P.O.	2.30
Bedingfield Village	2.32
Bedingfield P.O.	2.35
Rishangles War Memorial	2.40
Thorndon P.O.	2.45
Stoke Ash P.O.	2.55
Stoke Ash School	3.07
Thwaite P.O.	3.30
Wickham Skeith P.O.	3.45
Thornham Magna P.O.	3.55
Gislingham P.O.	4.05

transport, though sadly Helen McDermott was too busy that day to interview me. My most unusual passenger was a male fully-grown English bull mastiff. Soft as old lites boy, but not right daft. He lived on the edge of Thorndon, in the old police house, but would get out of his garden during the day and toddle a mile or more up to the village shop/post office. Carole would give 'me' a Cadbury's fudge bar to take him home. That is, half the bar to persuade him to get on the bus and half the bar to get him back into the garden! I got to thinking that dog's onto a good thing!! And I'm sure he did too.

The only time I did not like driving the bus was in snow and ice, a combination of front engine and rear drive was pretty hairy at times and on more than one occasion I have ended up facing where I had just come from. One memorable occasion I was on the afternoon shift when it started snowing heavily and conditions deteriorated very quickly. The final run back to Diss was via Yaxley then Eye, I had had a devil of a job to get out of Stoke Ash onto the A140 even though it was a small slope. Then from Yaxley I was marooned sideways

across the A140 trying to get over the camber to go to Eye with a car coming directly for me. I reckon I took most of the rubber off those tyres, with the speedo showing around 60mph and actually going about 4mph. I then realised I



Bob Ward and David Cott's restored Post Bus at the post box opposite Red House, Thornham Magna, 1990. Bob had trained ivy over the box while on his rounds.

was going to struggle to get up the long Lambseth Hill to get out of Eye to Diss. I crossed my fingers and when I got to Eye Post Office she was there. The lady, who ran the bookshop in Eye, but lived in Shelfanger and used the bus Monday to Friday. The important fact was she was a very large lady. She would normally sit in the seat behind the driver and have a good old mardle, but tonight

she was asked if she would sit in the seat near the back doors! She gave me a very knowing look and complied and still it took ages to get up that hill!

In 1985 the council withdrew their subsidy towards the costs of the two vehicles that Royal Mail had and the route was axed. Many moons later I was contacted by David Cott who I had met previously as an avid enthusiast of all Royal Mail vehicles. He had tracked down various Post Buses quietly rusting away and purchased one he found in Reading, brought it back to Norfolk and was restoring it. I had the pleasure of driving it for him and other enthusiasts on a special trip around the old route to great publicity. ”

I am grateful to David Cott (who at the last count owned 14 Post Buses), Barry Reynolds (of the East Anglia Postal History Study Centre) and Bob Ward for help in researching this subject.

OCTOBER EVENTS

Sunday 9th: Thornham Magna church, Rachel Brown, Revolutionary Flute Quartets, <http://musicatthornham.org.uk>

Saturday 15th: Apple day, Beyond the Wall at Thornham Walled Garden, 11.30 to 3.30, free

Friday 28th: Village Hall film, *Love and Friendship*, £5, please book Priscilla 01379 672903

Future films: Fri 25th Nov: *Our Kind of Traitor*; Sun 11th Dec, **afternoon film for children and adults:** *The BFG*