

A History of Telegraphy©TanciaLtd2014

Was it expensive?

It seems that the cost of sending a telegram was dependent upon the length of the message and the distance that it was being sent. As a method of communication, it was at least 30 times cheaper than using a semaphore system and so was instantly more appealing to the commercial sector. Where charges were made per word or for each set of ten words, customers were advised to be frugal with their language and resist worrying about the usual etiquette associated with written letters; "Naturally, there is a right way and a wrong way of wording telegrams. The right way is economical, the wrong way, wasteful. If the telegram is packed full of unnecessary words, words which might be omitted without impairing the sense of the message, the sender has been guilty of economic waste."ⁱⁱⁱ It is from advice such as this that the tradition of using the word 'stop' in the place of punctuation in telegrams originates. There would be an additional charge for punctuation as it would require a change in the pace of the telegraph operator.

Whilst there appears to be a variety of prices quoted for early telegrams, several sources suggest that at its inception, a telegram sent locally would cost an American penny per word, 2 cents per word in the 1920s and by the 1940s, 5 cents per word. This would suggest that a 10 word telegram would have cost an average worker an equivalent value of \$17 in 1866, \$8.50 in the 1920s and \$18.00 in the 1940s.^{iv} It is possible that the reason for its cheaper relative price during the 1920s could be as a result of the growing popularity of the telegraph during the 1920s and 1930s when its usage was at a peak and it was far cheaper to send a telegram rather than a long distance telephone call. The End of the Telegraph It could be suggested that the invention of the telephone, just 40 years after the telegraph was the beginning of its demise. The subsequent inventions of radio communications, telex and fax, all of which have their scientific roots in telegraphy led to its decline in the second half of the twentieth century. Whilst it is still possible to order a telegram online to be delivered by either a personal messenger or by postal delivery, the traditional telegraph service has ceased in most countries throughout the world. Ireland and England ceased their telegraph services in 2002 and 2003 respectively, with the Western Union in the United States ending their

telegram services in 2006. Australia and India, whose many remote communities had relied upon the telegraph service, were later to make the transition with their last telegrams sent in 2011 and 2013

Dear Geraldine

Most village Post Offices were not run by the Post Office but by a local business owner, hence why we have very little or no information on these offices. The local library for the area should have trade directories which list business addresses and who the postmaster was.

Ken Smith's work Post Offices in the UK by County can be found on the web. It can be a useful guide <https://sites.google.com/site/ukpostofficesbycounty/>

With best wishes

Barry Attoe

Discovery Room Manager

The Postal Museum | 15-20 Phoenix Place | London WC1X 0DA

T: +44 (0)300 0300 700 | T: +44 (0)20 8183 0067 | E: barry.attoe@postalmuseum.org

Geraldine,

It was the Telegraph Office at the post office that was discontinued in 1935, the rest of the post office functions continued as normal until 1995.

Regards,

Nick (who looks after the website for Ken, replying in case he missed your email).

On 28/01/2020 12:48, Ron and Geraldine Norman wrote:

Hello

Thank you very much for making your work so accessible; it is invaluable. I am researching the post office in Conistone with Kilnsey, Yorkshire (SKIPTON). Could you just clarify the reference *discount. 27.11.1935*? I am assuming it refers to something stopping but it seems that it was closed by 1995 and that seems a big gap.

Apologies if this is a very ill informed query!

Best wishes

Geraldine Norman

Good evening, Geraldine,

It was the Telegraph Office facility that ceased in 1935 i.e. the sending of telegrams.

I obtained this information from the Post Office Circular, which at that time was issued weekly to postmasters / sub-postmasters, showing changes that had just taken place.

As for the closure date - the PO was still listed in 1989, but had closed by 1995.

I haven't seen a list of offices between those dates, to help to narrow it down,
all the best,

Ken.