

**GD 10 1263**      **Letter from Mr John Syme to Robert Oliphant, Esq., Postmaster General of Scotland, dated 24th June 1773, concerning the Post Office in Gatehouse-of-Fleet.**

Sir,

As since ever you arrived I have called upon you both at your own House and the Post Office frequently, but have been so unfortunate as miss you and understand that you are to go out of Town this morning, I hope you will pardon me for troubling you with this upon a Subject I could better have explained in Conversation. It is in relation to fixing a Post Office and Post Master in the High road leading from Dumfries to Portpatrick, concerning which Mr Murray of Broughton and Lady Catherine Murray have wrote me in the most pressing manner, to inform you and beg your assistance, as far as consistent with your duty to the public. I can do it with the greater freedom, as the Situation of the County cannot be better known to any than it is to me, as I am there for Weeks and Months together every year at Mr Murray's seat. For time past memory the Post Office has been fixed at Gatehouse of Fleet, which is at the Foot of the avenue of Mr. Murray's house, which he has lately built and where he has laid out a very extensive policy, Before he did that Gatehouse was an inconsiderable place, but as it is situated in a fine open Country on the side of a navigable river when the Tide flows, and there is now built there a great many very neat Houses upon Ground which Mr Murray has feued and which is still increasing so that it has the prospect of being one of the prettiest villages without exception in the whole South Country. There is a very considerable Tannerie and Brewerie lately erected there where Mr Murray, several Gentlemen of the Country, and some from England are concerned, and Manufactories are established there, a Stamp Master is appointed, Public shops are kept and there are Artificers of almost every kind employed. On the Southward and towards Dumfries there are a number of Gentlemens Houses within the distance of one two or three miles of Gatehouse - On the other side as you go towards the Ferrytown of Cree for the space of Ten miles, there is but one Gentlemans House and few Tenants of any consideration, the whole being for the Space I have mentioned a long extended Waste or Muir pasture.

The Gatehouse is not half a Mile distant from Mr Murrays principal House he has built a fine Inn there containing about fifteen or sixteen good Rooms, with Stables and every conveniency and where Post Chaises are to be had in the same manner as in Etngland, one therefore could not imagine a better situation for a Post house, and it is not at all exagerated by me when I say that by Mr Murrays connections and the resort to his House, about three fourths of the Letters which come to that Post Office are delivered at his House, the situation of a Post Office at that place is therefor both convenient for him and for the reasons above mentioned extremely so to the public.

It would therefore require some exceeding good reason to make any alteration therein. He admits that the last Postmaster Mr Cuie was very negligent and unworthy of his Trust, an exceeding good reason for removing him, but none for removing the Post Office itself, however it has so happened that Mr Ker, having met with one deputed from the Postmaster of England to fix the Stages, they have altered the Situation of the Post Office and removed it to an obscure part tho' on the Post road, called the Clauchan of Anworth about two Miles further than the Gatehouse, so that the Stage from Carlingwark to Gatehouse which is about fifteen. Miles is now lengthened out to seventeen and the remainder of Stage to Ferrytown of Crec is only about Six or eight miles, which he apprehends is a very improper division or at least Mr Murray thinks he was entitled to have known of such Intention before it was carried in to Execution, as he was at his own house at the time of this meeting and if a Message had been sent to him, he could have shown the impropriety of the measure, as well as ..... the very great Inconveniency to himself by being obliged to send three miles every day back and forward with his Letters. The place where it is proposed to be fixed is on Mr Murrays Estate and indeed it is impossible it can be on any other part as his property extends all round for many Miles - His objections therefore can only arise from Inconveniency to the Public and himself, and he is convinced when the Circumstances are represented to you, that you will be of opinion that at least he was entitled to have been asked a question upon the Subject. The place to which it is now proposed to be removed is a new erected two penny House and two or three poor Cottages where no horses ever were kept for the service of the public, situated in a sort of Glen and very solitary when compared with the Gatehouse, the former Situation.

What could be the Inducement to make this improper Alteration Mr Murray cannot say. It could not be superior parts or Abilities in the Post Master because it was more natural that he should reside at the proper Station of a Post Office than that the Post Office should be removed for his conveniency, but to obviate any difficulty on this Head, Mr Murray recommends one James Heron a Feuar at Gatehouse for whom he will be answerable. Mr Murray would have wrote you himself, but he thought my waiting upon you and reading what he wrote would be equivalent. He does consider himself as improperly used on the Matter, as he thinks the least Compliment they could have paid him was to have

asked his opinion, when he was so near at hand. He is far from so much as insisting that this could be done by any authority from you, on the contrary he apprehends when you are informed of the Circumstances that you will give him such redress as is consistent with the Service of the public and your duty. At the same time he flatters himself, that you will pay some regard to his private Conveniency if it does not interfere with the public Service. Excuse this long detail which I thought necessary for your full Information and hoping for your Answer at Conveniency I am etc

Signed John Syme

Edin. 24 June 1773

P.S, As I was so unfortunate as to miss you I have Since writing you been with Mr Jackson who was so good as explain the plan and Alterations of the Stages and the reasons therefor and the accommodation given to Mr Murray by allowing a particular Bay for his family to be left and received at Gatehouse, since an alteration was to be made, this was very obliging to him and may answer his particular purpose, but the Effect the new plan may have on the public experience only can determine. It would have saved both you him and me this trouble had the Clerk explained the matter when he was so near at hand, but to be sure an alteration made without he knowing it or the reason therefor could not but alarm him. I have informed thereof and expect him in town next week when he will wait upon you and be more fully informed.