



THE BRUNDALL & BRAYDESTON CHRONICLE

The Quarterly Journal of the Brundall Local History Group

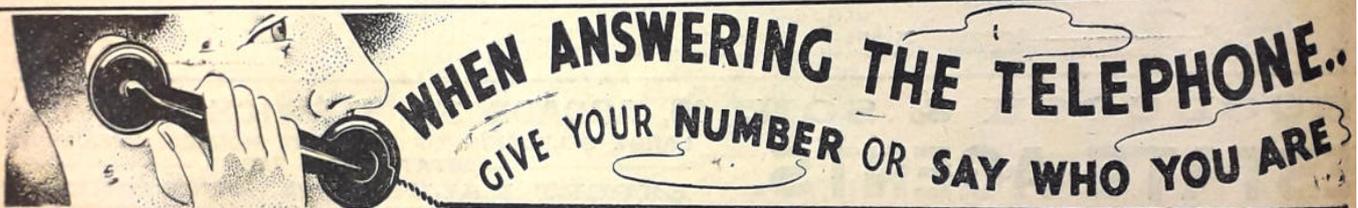
Linking generations across the community through collecting, preserving & sharing information & memories about our history and heritage

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MAKING A TELEPHONE CALL IN BRUNDALL



Notice in the Norwich Area Telephone Directory, January 1948

Never before have our communications devices been more important to us than at the present time. By pressing a few buttons or keys on a home or mobile phone, iPad or laptop computer, we often take for granted that we can instantly talk to family, friends or work colleagues anytime and anywhere in the world. Checking our emails and mobile texts has become an everyday routine and we can have reassuring face-to-face conversations through Skype or Zoom, limited only by the width of our broadband signal.

The Internet connects us to news of world-changing events, digitally transmitted 24 hours a day, live into our sitting rooms. Entertainment videos are constantly being streamed by digital production companies and millions of people are sending out and receiving messages and images through a variety of social media platforms. Online banking, shopping and other financial transactions have transformed the way essential supplies and services can be delivered, an aspect of modern life many of us are having to get used to, more so than we could ever have imagined before now.

In this 40th edition we will be tracing the development of the new telephone technologies that have changed everyday life, in our village and beyond, and brought us all to this point. We hope you will enjoy going on this journey with us.



Brundall's first telephone exchange and public phone office, Chester House, The Street, early 1900s before 1912.

www.brundallvillagehistory.org.uk

A BRIEF HISTORY OF TELECOMMUNICATIONS IN BRUNDALL

Before telephones, the only way to send a message over any distance was by letter in the post or by telegram. After the introduction of the penny post in 1840, from 1853 the General Post Office (GPO) erected pillar boxes around mainland Britain. The GPO's national telegraph service was launched in 1870 and in 1880 postmen first began riding bicycles to deliver letters and telegrams. At one time deliveries could be made several times a day and post-cards could arrive on the same day they were posted.

1891-1901: Brundall's first post master, Benjamin Winter Merrison and his wife Harriet, opened a post and telegraph office at 1, The Street, on the corner of Station Road. They had earlier operated from the Manor House next door. Selling provisions and other goods, the post office was strategically located near Brundall Station where trains carried the mail to and from Norwich and beyond. Since the line had opened in 1844, the railway had invested in electric telegraphy to manage its rail traffic and prevent accidents.



Local people and soldiers (convalescing at Brundall House), waiting outside Brundall post office 1914-1916.

1898: The private National Telephone Company sought permission to install a telephone system in Brundall. There was much local opposition to the unsightly posts and wires this involved. Agreement was reached on condition that decorative finials would be placed on top of the posts. After all the fuss, only six local people and businesses ordered

private telephones. The public phone office and exchange was located at *Chester House*, (now Florins dry cleaners, see page 1.)

One of the few remaining finial-topped telephone posts on Strumpshaw Road, Brundall.



1901: One of the first telephone operators was Edith Woodrow, the daughter of Robert and Sarah Woodrow who ran the Central Stores on the corner of Links Avenue and The Street.

1911: Wallace and Susannah Bell lived at *Chester House*, working for the NTC with their fifteen year old daughter Gertrude, also an operator.

1912: The GPO took over all the private telephone companies operating in Britain. The new nationalised service standardised the system across the country. Initially private telephones did not have dials or pads to press. The caller had to pick up the handset of their telephone and wait for the operator to say "*Number please!*" and, after speaking the name and number clearly, they would be connected.

1936: By this date a hierarchy of directors was in charge of eight regions outside of London to control and co-ordinate Post Office services. The telephone manager for the Norwich area was based at *Telephone House*, 41-45 St Giles Street, Norwich. As well as Norwich, he was responsible for over 100 telephone exchanges around Norfolk, including a manual exchange based at *Enfield Cottage*, Brundall. In 1937 Doris Batchelor started working here as an operator when she was sixteen, the minimum age to work for the GPO, and had to take an examination and oath of secrecy.



Operator at a small exchange c.1930 (BT Archives)



Enfield House, 56, The Street as it is today, having incorporated the 'cottage'.

1930s: By this date telephones with lettered and numbered dials were the norm. No-one owned their own telephones; the GPO rented standard hand sets to everyone along with the line. A local telephone directory with the names and numbers of all the subscribers in the area was also supplied. From Brundall there were just seven lines to Norwich covering Brundall, Blofield, Lingwood and Strumpshaw with all the numbers pre-fixed by *Brundall*. There were only about 200 subscribers at this time, mainly because the cost was still out of reach for many. As a result, all the phone numbers were very short, just up to three figures.



Advertisement, including the phone number, for Perkin's Chemist, Brundall 1939

1936: Telephone boxes, or “kiosks”, were installed in every town and village with its own Post Office. This directive was organised as part of King George V's Silver Jubilee celebrations in 1935. The red, cast-iron Jubilee kiosk, designed by Sir Giles Gilbert Scott, is one of the most fondly remembered British landmarks.



A 1936 phone kiosk which once stood on the corner of Highfield Avenue and The Street. Inside, the coin box had a Button A and Button B mechanism.

1939-1945: When war broke out, international calls were suspended and telegrams from the Post office were also banned. The Army installed their own lines at the Brundall exchange with its own operator who slept in a camp bed overnight. The local Home Guard kept watch over the telephone system in case of enemy invasion and Norwich PO engineers were on constant alert to repair any bomb damage to cables.

1948: Due to the higher demand for residential telephones, only shared party lines were allocated to new customers. A householder might have to wait until their neighbour's conversation had finished before they could make a call. The phone bell would ring in both houses so either one could answer it.

1959: Standard Telephone Dialling (STD) was introduced so callers could connect directly via the Norwich exchange without needing to go through an operator. The Brundall exchange became redundant and *Enfield Cottage* was sold.

The first versions of the Pay-On-Answer coin box began to replace the old button A & B models.

1972: In response to the spike in local population growth, a new automatic telephone exchange opened in East Avenue, Brundall. The system took 1600 subscribers in Brundall and eight surrounding villages into the Norwich area code system and all numbers were to be prefixed by the number 71.



Telephone Exchange, East Avenue, 2020

1980s -2000s: The first cell mobile phones were developed in the 1980s. By the 1990s text messaging was becoming general practice.

1981: British Telecommunications and the Post Office became separate corporations.

1984: *British Telecom* privatised by the government and 50% of shares offered to the British public and employees. Gradually red phone boxes were replaced by plainer payphone booths made of aluminium and steel with large panels of vandal resistant glass. The photograph on the left was taken in 1985, shortly before this, and other boxes around the village, were replaced.

1989: The World Wide Web was invented by British scientist Tim Berners-Lee.

1996: BT's internet dial-up service launched.

2000: Broadband launched in the UK. By 2009 50% of households were connected.

2006: BT launched *Openreach*, giving rival operators equal access to its network. BT would service all the main Internet providers.

2007: The Apple Corporation launched the *iPhone*, turning the cell phone into a computer and camera.

2010: Apple's *iPad* launched and supplied to schools.

2011: TV switched from analogue to digital reception in Norfolk.

2017: Virgin media installed fibre optic broadband cables throughout Brundall.

Openreach green junction boxes and Virgin media grey boxes now adorn our village, including locations where phone boxes once stood. In the new age of the mobile phone, Brundall no longer has a public pay phone.



Compiled by **Chloe Veale**

GRAHAM KENWORTHY 1943-2020

BLHG has always been fortunate to have members who were knowledgeable in their own field. Graham, who died in January, was one of these. His expertise was in the railways and he was always the first person to consult.

Graham joined British Rail as a student Civil Engineer in 1960 and transferred to the Divisional Office in Norwich in 1965 until he retired in 1996. Graham lived in Brundall for over 50 years. Brundall seemed a natural choice for a railway enthusiast to settle with its two stations and their history.

Graham co-authored a prolific series of books on main and branch lines and collaborated with Mike Page on Norfolk's Railway Heritage from the air. When the decision was made to publish the *Book of Brundall and Braydeston* it was Graham who assisted Susen Turner in compiling the chapter on the railways.

Graham's delight was imparting his knowledge with a dry sense of humour. His talk to BLHG in 2009 on *Local Railway Miscellany* included 'snippets' from his collection about the Brundall stations which were not well known.

Graham lived to see the 175th Anniversary Celebration of the opening of the railway connecting Norwich and Great Yarmouth held last year at Brundall post office.

Graham's son Stephen maintains the family's connection with BLHG by auditing our annual accounts. Stephen recalls that it was it was Graham himself who recommended him for the position.

When a train toots and trundles alongside the Brundall Countryside Park on Saturday mornings, Stephen and other parkrun runners are reminded of the man who contributed so much to our knowledge of our railway.

John Thomson



Photographs from Graham Kenworthy's own collection taken at Brundall Station. Above: 1955 Below: 2001



BLHG NEWS

CORONAVIRUS (Covid 19):

Following government advice, all of our public talks and events have been postponed until the autumn. We hope to invite our speakers again when we are able to re-start the programme. Members will be kept informed and the website regularly updated.

50TH ANNIVERSARY OF BRUNDALL PRIMARY SCHOOL:

A set of learning resources was successfully delivered to the school for its special "Brundall Memories" study week in early February. This generated interest and enthusiasm among the teachers and children and wonderful feedback has been received about the work that our materials inspired. Although the school has closed and public events connected with the project postponed, BLHG is still working on the production of a professionally designed series of free, interactive and downloadable digital resources for home learning and enjoyment, supported by the Co-op's Community Fund. Launch dates will be announced in due course.

Editor's Note:

Although auto-despatch of this edition by email this time was a possible option, we have made every effort to send the *Chronicle* direct to your home in its familiar and traditional format via the wonderful public service the Royal Mail continues to provide. We would like to thank *Interprint* for their reprographic services.

Please note: Only one person, wearing protective equipment, has been involved in the despatch of this mailing.

THIS EASTERTIME STAY HOME and STAY SAFE