

DINTON SUB-POST OFFICE

On a Friday in November 1978 Peter and I, our children Susie & Keith and my mother Dorothy moved into the sub-post office in Dinton.

We arrived with the Removal Van in the middle of the afternoon and proceeded to unload into the residential part of the building at the back. The shop closed at 5pm and at 6pm an employee of the Aylesbury Post Office called me into the shop and asked me to verify the accounts, stock etc that they had just calculated. You can imagine that after a day of driving from Essex to Buckinghamshire, having emptied one house and filled another I was in no fit state to read let alone verify anything and told him and his colleague that I was very happy to take their word for it.

I signed the forms accordingly and was then the appointed sub-postmaster (female) and ready to open the doors the following morning at 9am – well as my only previous retail experience had been at Scout Jumble Sales “ready” is perhaps not quite the word to use. However, at 9am we duly opened and one of the men who had closed the post-office the evening before came to help me through my first few hours. I must say that he was extremely helpful and kind and came again on Monday and Tuesday and then decided that I could cope alone, reminding me that he was always on the other end of the telephone and I could ring him at any time for assistance – which I did on several occasions.

At the end of every week on Friday evenings a complete stock-take of post-office supplies had to be made and a huge accounts form had to be filled in. **Let me explain that the shop and the post-office business had to be kept completely separately, if you wanted a pound of bananas and 6 stamps you had to make two separate transactions.** The same helpful man from Aylesbury came four Fridays running to get me through this nerve-wracking experience.

Peter was Lecturing in London and because he did two nights a week night-classes, had one day a week off when he went to Cash & Carry. He also worked in the shop most Saturday mornings. Apart from the hard work of carrying heavy boxes and large bags of potatoes, working in the shop was like one long coffee morning as we soon got to know everyone who came in (it wasn't until we closed and I had time to get out and meet people that I discovered that a large proportion of the residents never patronised the shop and I, therefore, had never met them)



My mother, who was then 70 years old, had worked in Canterbury Post Office in her early twenties and was amazed to find that things had not changed that much and so she was a great help and helped in the shop week-day mornings.

We managed to increase the shop takings in our first couple of months as we improved the fruit and vegetables side of the business (with the kind and generous help, encouragement and advice from the Porters at Stone) and did Saturday deliveries which proved popular.

We had a dry-cleaning agency and also a photo developing agency, supplied fresh eggs, ham and cheese and daily deliveries of fresh bread. Everything was going smoothly.

But then 2 things happened – **TESCO'S** opened and provided free buses to all the surrounding villages and everyone invested in **large chest freezers!!** These two things made a terrific difference to our trade. VAT also went up and this increased all our non-food products. Peter, my Mother and I had never taken salaries out of the business the only person who got paid was Susie who earned pocket money working in the shop on Saturday mornings. I did not even take the £3,000 post-office salary that helped to keep the business afloat.

In 1981 when Peter was offered a job in Kenya working on a UN Project, we decided to accept and we put the shop on the market hoping that we could sell it as a going concern. Unfortunately after our little surge in takings in the first 2 months of running the shop, our turnover never increased and with the increase in VAT in actual fact it went down, so that when prospective buyers looked at our accounts they could see that there was no way that one could make a living out of it. After a couple of months we had to accept that we would never be able to sell it as a Shop/Post-Office and gave notice to the General Post Office at Aylesbury that we would be closing. It was a sad decision but we could not financially carry on with a business that made no return.

Most people were understanding and sympathetic when we notified them of the decision to close, the only ones who weren't were those who never used the shop but said that they liked the thought that it was there!!!! Lovely sentiments but they don't pay bills.

So our adventure into running a village Shop/Post Office was over and on Good Friday 1981 we closed. Aylesbury Post-Office came in at 5pm, we had to leave the shop and they went through the post office accounts and checked the stock etc. When they called me in at about 6pm and asked me if I wanted to check their work because they had found that I had 2.5 pence more in the till than showed in the accounts, I was happy to accept their findings and sign the paper work.

We really enjoyed what we did and loved meeting people, either villagers from Dinton, Upton & Ford or people just passing through.

Would we do it again? Well not now, we are much too old, but we have never regretted the experience.

After the closure we worked in Kenya and Papua New Guinea coming back to Dinton in November 1990. During the time that we were overseas my Mother and children Susie & Keith stayed in the house. My Mother moved to Upton-on-Severn to be near my brother and Susie later moved out, leaving Keith on his own with his dogs. We left Dinton in 1997 to move to Northamptonshire to be nearer to our daughter and grand-daughter. While I was in Dinton I was Secretary of the Fete Committee and kept the Parish Record

I joined Haddenham WI but later joined Dinton WI and was at different times Secretary and Treasurer. My Mother, also joined Dinton WI and attended services at the Chapel.

Shirley Corke
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