

The Dinton Shops. (Part 1)

The Old Post Office situated at the top of Bigg's lane was the site of the original Post Office. We believe that it ceased to be a shop and Post Office in the late 1920s (probably after the village hall had been built) and it was then re-housed nearer to the centre of the village. The old Post Office then became a private dwelling house. When we lived in Dinton this house was occupied by a Mr. & Mrs. Fletcher.

The earliest Postmaster of the new Post Office (that we knew) was Mr. Osborne who also sold a range of groceries, sweets and tobacco etc. as well as postage stamps and provided the normal P.O. services. Mrs. Yates then followed for a short



time and her place was taken by Mrs. and Mr. May and her family (Peter, Ruth and Edward). Using this shop for a few items could take rather a long time as there was generally a queue of people and Mrs. May had to find each item, weigh some of the items, tell the customer each price and write that down on a piece of paper. At the end of the list it then had to be

added up to reveal the final price. (No calculators in those days!) If the Post Office telephone rang during this time Mrs. May would answer it and then of course it would take priority as it was probably a telegram! On Saturday mornings and during the holidays some of us would be waiting outside the Post Office for Mrs. May to ask us to deliver the telegram. The minimum we would be paid to deliver it in Dinton was 3d. but often the telegram was for Aston Mullins farm in Ford. We would cycle to Ford and receive the handsome sum of 1s. 6d. This was a good way to increase our pocket money. The Post Office closed at noon on Saturdays until the following Monday morning at 9am. The shop opened each Monday until Saturday 5pm. with a half day closing on Wednesday. The May family left around the end of the 1940s or beginning of the 1950s to be followed by Mrs. Hunt. (Mr. May was also our scoutmaster, well liked and dedicated to scouting).

The Dinton Shops. (Part 2)

In Westington, William and Emma Walker with their daughters moved into the thatched cottage just off the green and opened a general grocery shop selling a range of goods similar to the other two shops in Dinton. The shop was just a room within the house and they traded there for a few years and eventually sold up their business to Mrs. Woodford who continued trading as a general grocery store.



This picture shows the three Walker girls outside of the old cottage before they moved along the lane to Woodbine cottages.



Mrs. Woodford added to the business by offering a delivery service to take packages and goods etc. to and from Aylesbury railway station or the surrounds. The goods were taken by horse and cart to and from Dinton by her hired help who we all knew as Kyo and he was a lovely old character. His surname was 'Miles' and he lodged with Mrs. Woodford but what his real name was we know not but he was a jolly man and always cheerful. My mother visited Mrs. Woodford's shop every Saturday afternoon to buy groceries and it was partly a social event as she was given tea and biscuits and they had a good chinwag together, putting the world to right! Later in the afternoon I would cycle

down to the shop to meet my mother and put her bags on the handlebars of my bicycle to take her shopping home.

Soon the Second World War had started and food rationing had been imposed. This severely restricted what Mrs. Walker could sell as shop owners had to hold a minimum number of customer's ration books, but Mrs. Walker carried on her business regardless, selling whatever she was allowed to including paraffin and tobacco products which was the main part of her business.

The picture shows the two cottages that William and Emma Walker bought with Emma outside her shop.



The population of Dinton was quite low in those days as many of the younger ones were away in the services so there were a limited number of ration books to go around between the shops. She also sold Smith's crisps, chocolate bars and slabs of toffee which she would break up into smaller pieces to sell. The Walkers survived! Mrs. Walker was extremely careful not to waste anything especially when measuring out paraffin as spillage meant lost income! They did not have a telephone so it was a personal visit to Chennells, the wholesalers in Aylesbury who were situated opposite the old Odeon cinema in Cambridge Street to order the goods which were then delivered to her shop by van. After the goods had been delivered Pamela, her granddaughter, would help her Grandmother to unpack the boxes and put everything away. As Pamela became older she would go to the wholesalers on her own to do the ordering for the shop. The weighing scales were always kept in good order as the Weights and Measures officials made frequent visits. (Pamela still has parts of these scales). Mrs. Walker's shop closed each Tuesday afternoon.

The Dinton Shops. (Part 3)



Opposite the Post Office at the top of Boot Lane in the premises of the old Boot Inn was a shop owned and run by Mrs. Pratt. This shop also sold general groceries, fresh eggs laid by her own chickens, sweets, tobacco products etc. as well as paraffin and methylated spirits. In addition to these goods Mrs. Pratt provided a service for the villagers to recharge their accumulators (lead/acid batteries) which were used to power their wireless sets (radios). There was a time when very few people had

mains electricity and those who owned a wireless set would normally have two accumulators; one connected to the set and the other one would have been recharged and perhaps distilled water added as required at Mrs. Pratt's shop for a small fee to replace the one when its power ran out. Paraffin was used as a fuel for the oil lamps and primus stoves which most of us had until electricity came to Dinton! Mrs. Pratt's husband Alfred set up and ran a coal and coke delivery service for the area with the help of his business partner and future son-in-law Frank Shuttleworth.

In the 1930s and into the 1940s the bakery in High Street Dinton was owned and run by

the three Hitchcock brothers, Fred, Stan and Jack where they baked and delivered the daily bread. After the war with the country 'broke' and on austerity rations white bread virtually disappeared as the bread was made from British wheat and always looked 'grey' in colour. It was good bread though and perfectly edible. With the retirement of the Hitchcock family the bakery in the late 1940s the bakery was bought by John Webb and Fred Rushton who already owned the shop and bakery in Ford. They continued



making our daily bread both white and brown although many people blamed the 'grey' bread on John! The 'grey' bread stayed with us for some time till the Canadian wheat became available again. The weight and price of each loaf of bread was strictly controlled and checks were constantly made. After the basic dough ingredients were mixed the dough was cut and weighed, allowing for the moisture loss during baking thus achieving the correct final weight. Each piece was then kneaded and the expert bakers held a piece in each hand to speed up the process. This was hard work and tiring and eventually John Webb purchased a power driven kneading machine. The baker just

dropped the piece of dough into the loading hopper and as quick as a flash the kneaded dough came out from the other end all ready for 'proving'. John Webb introduced a large range of cakes and pastries which proved to be very popular in Dinton and surrounding villages. The Ford bakery was then closed and Fred Rushton and his wife remained to run the Ford shop. Fred also helped with the village delivery service. Bread and cakes were produced six days a week and as petrol was subjected to rationing, these goods were delivered to the Dinton households using a handcart three times a week! A small van was used to deliver the bread and cakes to Upton, Ford, Stone, Bishopstone, Hartwell, Cuddington and Haddenham. The Dinton inhabitants could of course personally call at the bake-house to purchase their requirements if they had missed the delivery or needed extra. As petrol restrictions were relaxed the hand cart delivery was abandoned in favour of a motorised van. (Pushing that cart around Dinton on a Saturday afternoon was hard work!). With increases in running costs customers were asked to pay a small weekly delivery charge. This was not a popular move but in certain cases for customers who were having difficulties John waived this fee. (He had a very kind heart). John Webb was not only a superb bread baker but was also an expert maker of wedding cakes with immaculate white icing decoration. John also purchased a powered bread slicing machine and introduced his customers to having sliced wrapped bread delivered, again proving a popular commodity.

Sunday was clearly a day of rest for the Dinton shop keepers and all the shops closed on Saturday afternoon around 5pm till the following Monday morning, opening again at 9am. Those that held tobacco licences would never sell these products to under aged children and we all knew that if we had dared to ask for cigarettes our parents would probably know before we arrived home! (That didn't stop us asking the older boys to obtain some for us!). None of these shops sold alcoholic beverages but soft drinks such as lemonade, orangeade and later coca cola were available. With the range of goods sold by the five shops Dinton was very well supplied and supplemented by a daily milk delivery from Westlington farm. Smith's the butcher from Haddenham brought fresh meat to Dinton once a week and Brown's the fishmonger brought fresh fish. There was probably a fruit and vegetable van as well but most of the villagers grew their own. Newspapers were delivered every day by Joe Woodford from Ford. Although the four shops sold very similar goods there was no competition between them as RPM (retail price maintenance) prevailed, so for the same item by law could only be sold at the same price in all shops until RPM was abolished in 1964. Most villagers would therefore use the shops that were nearest to their home or who perhaps liked the particular shop owner. For the villagers it was still necessary to travel to Aylesbury using the Oxford bus to obtain goods not supplied by the Dinton shops but the bus fare took extra money and the goods then had to be carried home.

As the years passed the supermarkets came, more and more people prospered enough to be able to purchase a motorcar which in turn allowed them and their families to venture easily into the town. No more lugging the shopping bags to the bus station. The shopkeepers worked long and hard each day and the profit margins were small. Many of the small shops could not compete with the supermarkets and so gradually they closed down. Some of them struggled on till old age caught up with the owners and probably new blood could not make enough profit to ensure a viable living. Using the Internet shopping lists can be readily ordered from your own home and the goods delivered to the households at your convenience. Even the turnover at the Post Office wasn't enough or maybe no-one wanted to take it on. Soon all the Dinton shops including the Post Office were closed. Now in Dinton ...no shops...no bakery... no Post Office.

This article has been written jointly by G.S.Weedon and Pamela Jeffrey (nee Hopgood). Pamela is the granddaughter of William and Emma Walker and supplied me with some of the photos and a good deal of the background information. Pamela's husband Frank who was employed by Webb and Ruston for several years also provided us with some good memories.