

The Post Office in Grayshott

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The Post Office in Grayshott The Beginning of postal services

To trace the beginnings of postal services in England we have to go back to the reign of Charles 1st. In 1635, Charles decided that he wished to extend his private delivery service for the use of the general public. Charges were set at 2 pence for a single sheet under 80miles, 4 pence for under 140 miles and 6 pence over 140miles. Letters were usually on single or multiple sheets, folded and sealed and the fees were payable by the recipient.

In 1660, Post Houses were established for the purpose of delivering or collecting mail. The mail was generally carried by post boys on horseback, in stages generally of about ten miles, to where fresh horses were available. An announcement was made of his arrival at the Post House by the blowing of the Post Horn. In 1784, Stage Coaches were introduced, initially to carry packages, the coach carrying armed guards to protect against highwaymen. The coaches bore the Royal Coat of Arms and the Royal Mail insignia.

It was in 1840 that the penny black stamp was introduced, heralding the system still in use today---prepayment and charges according to weight bands. The rates at this time varied from one penny for a half ounce letter, two pence for one ounce and an additional two pence per ounce up to a maximum sixteen ounces. Also around this time, roadside mail boxes were introduced. In 1870, the Post Office took over the telegram business, the telegrams being delivered by young boys on bicycles who would often wait for a reply, which would then be telegraphed back to the original sender. In the late 19th century, the parcel post service was formally introduced, and post cards came into being, originally plain but later illustrated. The Early Days in Grayshott

The earliest known postal services to the area were to Haslemere toward the end of the seventeenth century, when the first Post Road from London to Haslemere was opened. This, of course, was before the existence of the village of Grayshott and it was not until later in the nineteenth century, in about 1864, that the first post was delivered here. At this time, the post was bought on horseback to Grayshott, via Haslemere and later Bramshott, to Edward l'Anson's house, *Heather Lodge*, on the South side of Headley Road not far from Grayshott Hall. The population was sparse as there were less than a hundred residents in the village and so they would go to *Heather Lodge* to collect and to send their mail.

In the 1870's, Henry and Hannah Robinson had established a shop, mainly selling groceries, at *Mount Cottage*, on the site which is near to *Pinewood* opposite School Road. Here, they are shown in the 1881 census, to be living with their son Peter, daughter Ruth and Hannah's son from her first marriage, Archie Moore. This shop then became the focal point for mail until the Robinsons moved to new premises in Haslemere Road, now known as Crossways Road.

It was in the late 1870s that areas of land in Crossways Road became available for purchase and in 1879, Henry Robinson purchased from Henry Blake, Auctioneer, of Farnborough, Hants, a large plot of land, measuring sixty feet frontage along Crossways Road by some two hundred feet in depth, for the sum of £19.10.0d. This area was divided into three plots which now consist of *Thornton House*, *Crossways House* and Pilgrims Letting Agency.

It would appear that the buildings were erected on the site in the early to mid 1880's and in the 1891 census, Henry Robinson and his family are shown as living at The Post Office in Crossways Road. Peter is shown as a "Letter Carrier" and Ruth as the "Telephonist" with Henry himself shown as "Grocer and Postmaster". Archie is shown as a "Grocer's Assistant". At this time the shop and Post Office (a sub office of Petersfield) were in the building now occupied by Pilgrims - *Crossways House*. Unfortunately, we have no definitive record of when the Post Office actually moved to *Thornton House* although the building became known as The Post Office in 1934 (*see below*).

Grayshott Village Archive

<http://www.grayshott-archive.org.uk>

"Granny" Robinson outside her shop (Pilgrims-Crossways House) c.1925-8

Hannah "Granny" Robinson

Edgar Leuchars the Architect had built a summer house in the area in 1880 and he made requests for a telegraph facility to be opened in the village. This facility was duly installed in 1890, with an announcement being made in the local newspaper, stating that telegrams could now be sent and received at the Grayshott Post Office. However, this was to lead to problems for Henry Robinson in 1892, owing to his children, Peter and Ruth, being accused of making "irregular remarks to other Post Offices via the Telegraph system and writing insolently worded reports on behalf of their father in reply to enquiries from his superior officers". Henry Robinson was duly dismissed and Walter Chapman, a local joiner and cabinet maker, was then appointed sub-postmaster in July 1892. Walter's shop, to which the Post Office business was transferred, was situated a few doors along Crossways Road to the east of the Robinsons and where *Pendarvis House* stands today.

It was in September 1898 that Flora Thompson moved to Grayshott to work in the Post Office as a trained telegraphist, working for Walter Chapman and with Annie Symonds as her junior assistant. Annie had moved to the village with her parents from Cheshire in 1892 aged thirteen and went to work at the Post Office after a period as a pupil and then pupil-teacher at Grayshott National School. Customers of the Post Office would by now include a number of eminent people including Arthur Conan Doyle and George Bernard Shaw amongst others.

Flora Thompson

Chapman's shop & Post Office 1900

Annie Symonds

In November 1892, Walter, who was thirty-six at the time, married Emily Revelle in All Saints' Church, Headley. Walter and Emily had five children.

The number of telegrams being sent daily steadily increased, to such an extent that the Grayshott office found it difficult to cope. By September 1900, a new Telegraph System had been installed in the Hindhead Post Office, which initially resulted in some sixty telegrams were being sent each day. However, this change resulted in Grayshott's telegraph traffic being greatly reduced and by March 1901, Flora had left Grayshott.

The tenure of Walter Chapman as Sub-Postmaster was abruptly terminated following his arrest for the murder of his wife Emily (*see - Grayshott, The story of a Hampshire Village by J.H.Smith*) on 29th July 1901. The post of sub-postmaster was then taken up by Walter's younger brother Oliver, who was appointed on 26th August 1901. Oliver had been Superintendent of Joinery at his father's joinery business at the time and was also organist and choirmaster at St. Luke's Church, a position he continued for almost forty years. (*The 1901 census shows Oliver to be at Hollywell Cottage, situated at the end of Victoria Terrace in Crossways Road.*) However, Oliver continued to run the Post Office and shop for over thirty years, although it is not clear where he was living for much of this time.

Thornton House c.1936

Chapman's Joinery Shop & Post Office c.1900

Chapman Advertisement

1903

It was in 1903 that the General Post Office arranged for the mail to be brought from Haslemere to Grayshott by mail cart and thereafter delivered by postman to addresses within the area.

Grayshott Village Archive

<http://www.grayshott-archive.org.uk>

Annie Symonds continued to work there after Oliver took over and a new assistant, Edith Smith, was appointed to replace Flora Thompson. Annie married Oliver's son Harold in 1910 after which they moved to Beacon Hill to manage the Post Office there. Thornton House

Thornton House remained in the Robinson family until 1934. In 1904, Henry Robinson bequeathed that upon his death all of his real estate should pass to his wife Hannah, with his son having custody of the property deeds, and upon her death, *Thornton House* should pass to son Peter and *Crossways House* to daughter Ruth. Henry died 26th January 1905.

For a period of time *Thornton House* was occupied by a G. Tollington but on 3rd November 1906, it was leased to a Caroline Potter of Guildford. Caroline died on 26th February 1908 and the lease passed on to Edith Emily Potter, possibly Caroline's sister, a Spinster of Farnham. It appears that a new lease was made between Peter Robinson, now described as a Cab Proprietor, and Henry Potter, Caroline's brother, of Guildford. Henry died on 8th September 1915 and we have no record of who actually lived in *Thornton House* until it was sold by Peter in 1934.

Hannah Robinson, who in later life was known as Granny Robinson, died on 14th November 1929 and *Thornton House* passed into the ownership of son Peter and *Crossway House* to daughter Ruth, by now Mrs. Harmer. On 23rd January 1934, Peter Robinson sold *Thornton House* to Frank Salvidge, proprietor of the River Arms Hotel, Sturminster Newton, Dorset, for the sum of £ 650.00, including the right to draw water from the well of *Crossways House*. Following this transaction according to the Conveyance for Sale, *Thornton House* became known as *The Post Office Stores*.

Seven months later, Salvidge sold the property to Milton Bridgeland a Newsagent of Bridgelands Library, Sandgate, Kent, for the sum of £1.700, who in turn retained the property until its sale to a Roland Smith on 7th May 1938. The Conveyance for this sale for the sum of £1,250.00, shows Bridgeland as residing at his address in Kent, and Smith as Sub-Postmaster of Petersfield, living at *The Post Office Stores*, Grayshott.

In August 1959, Roland Smith leased the property for a period of twenty-one years to Gladys Gooderham of Ealing, for the sum of £250 per annum. In 1971, Roland Smith died and the property passed to his wife, Mary, at which time the value was deemed to be below £4,500. In 1973, Mary Smith sold the property to William and Eileen Oxtoby, who were resident at Thornton House at the time, for the sum of £10,000. The property was then sold in 1982 to Gordon and Mollie Harris, of Haslemere, and on again to Paul and Audrey Randall of Silwood Stores, Sunninghill, Ascot, in 1988. Later, the business was bought by Robert and Fike Kelbie and then Steven Aldridge and Kevin Bourne.

Thornton House - Oxtoby - 1973/82

Advertisement 2008

Today the Post Office and shop, owned by Noel and Michelle Reidy, continues to thrive at Thornton House as a prime focal point of village life.

Brian Tapp
Grayshott Village Archive
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Acknowledgements:

Surrey History Centre

On the Trail of Flora Thompson - John Owen Smith

Grayshott The story of a Hampshire Village - J.H.Smith