

# The Village Post – Shrivenham

The history known so far - By Neil B. Maw



We again thank George Merryweather, the Steward of the Beckett Estate from 1815 to 1821, for information about the early postal system in Shrivenham. Throughout his letters to Lord Barrington, he noted at the end of numerous letters that, *'the postman waits,'* so he must finish writing. He also mentioned that not every day was a post day, for instance in March 1816, he noted that, *'Monday not being a post day.'* He also provided the information that the postman could be flexible to suit the circumstances when in November 1815 he remarked that the postman was returning to Faringdon unusually early, adding that, *'he came to Shrivenham on account of a letter addressed to Mr Berens (the Vicar) reference to his mother-in-law being extremely ill in London.'* He also complained about the postal service when in December 1818 he wrote, *'there must be great irregularity in the post,'* and added that, *'I lately had a letter from your Lordship which has been a week or eight days on the posting.'* (The Letters of George Merryweather, published by Shrivenham Heritage Society 2020). Robert Dawson was the successor to George Merryweather, and his daughter, Anna Maria Dawson, of her time at Beckett (1821-25) wrote in her memoirs, *'Faringdon was our post town, and a boy on a donkey used to come every*

*morning with the post bag, which was locked and return with it in the afternoon.'* (SHS No N909. A sketch of my father's life, Robert Dawson, by A.M. Lamotte).



And this was the way that the postal system worked in England, by individual industry and organisation of horse-drawn coach services. In the early part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the post man would be sent from the post town to the surrounding villages and call at an individual house. The local people would take their post with the fee to that individual who became known as the, Sub-Postmaster. In the case of Beckett, it was lucky in that the road to Faringdon ran directly past Beckett House and it was most likely that he would call at the kitchen to pick up or drop off the post and, no doubt, have some refreshment. It wasn't until the 1840s that the post became more organised with the invention of the pre-paid stamp with an adhesive back. Pillar Post boxes were introduced in 1853 and the first wall boxes were installed in 1857.



Victorian pedestal and wall-mounted post boxes

The earliest documentary evidence we have for the occupier of the property that is the, 'Old Post Office,' in the High Street, Shrivenham, comes from the Tithe Survey of 1844. With this we can learn that the property on the corner of Hazell's Lane and High Street, (13 High Street - aka Thatched Shop) was occupied by Joseph Hughes, who was Shrivenham Parish Clerk, and the Schoolhouse for boys was built behind it (Later to be the Forrester's Hall). The Kelly's Directory for 1848 listed Joseph Hughes as the postmaster and further that, 'A foot messenger dispatched from Faringdon at 7am arrives at Shrivenham about 1/2 past 9; a mail from Shrivenham to Faringdon at 6pm in summer & 5pm in winter.' The property was occupied by Henry Fuce. The census of 1841 also listed the two properties next door to each other which makes it highly likely that Henry Fuce was there then, with his wife Ann and five children. Henry Fuce owned three cottages on the opposite corner of Hazell's Lane, that was to become the Crown pub. (For Crown Pub info please go to SHS N1012).



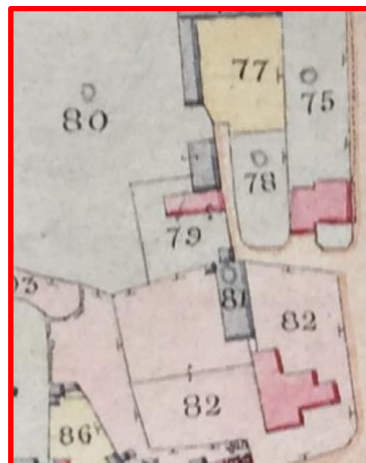
Tithe map of 1843/4. No 197 = Owner: Lord Barrington. Occ: Henry Fuce. No 198 = Owner: Shrivenham Poor. Occ: Joseph Hughes.

The census of 1851 for Shrivenham provided the information that Joseph Hughes the Parish Clerk, at 13 High Street, was the Postmaster. Then he would have acted as a delivery and pick-up point for the post service from Faringdon.



13 High St, circa 1955, more popularly known as the 'Thatched Shop.' Photo courtesy of Paul Williams

It would be a few more years before Shrevenham acquired a dedicated Post Office. It seems that happened after the death of Joseph Hughes in August 1854. The census of 1861 confirmed that a Post Office was then located at the premises occupied by Samuel Lamb who was a Draper and Grocer. The Barrington Estate Map of 1866 confirmed that the premises occupied by Samuel Lamb is in Manor Lane, the present-day Fern House. We know a considerable amount about this premises which was owned and used by Linen Draper, William Canfield circa 1810.



Barrington Estate Map of 1866. No 75 = Occupier: Samuel Lamb.  
78 = Samuel Lamb - Garden



The first Post Office in Shrevenham in Manor Lane, today called Fern House

The Barrington Estate map of 1866 also provided the information that George Butler occupied the property in between The Firs and 13 High Street (The Reading Rooms or Men's Institute was not built until 1904. SHS No N1422). His obituary that was printed in the newspaper provided the information that he had been Postmaster of Shrevenham for 39 years, which meant that 1866 was the year he was appointed. (Faringdon Adver 9/12/1905). It is likely that this is when the Post Office moved from Samuel Lamb's business in Manor Lane to the High Street. The census of 1861 showed that George's house was already a Stationer's Shop and Book Seller, so aptly suited for the job.



The Old Post Office circa 1930s. Photo courtesy of Paul Williams

The census of 1871 showed George Butler aged 44, as Postmaster with his wife Elizabeth 32, and three young sons. The census of 1881 listed George and Elizabeth, but only one son remained living at home. The following census of 1891 showed son William, age 26, as an assistant in the Post Office. By the census of 1901, George was age 74 but still listed as the Postmaster. He died in December 1905 and his obituary that appeared in the Faringdon Advertiser described him as, *'an old and respected servant of the post office authorities.'* It also added that he was an Assistant Overseer of the village for many years. A large number of people attended his funeral at Shrivenham Church.

Elizabeth Butler took over as Postmistress and the census of 1911 showed that she had two assistants, Louisa Lock and Gertrude Lock. She passed away five years later in December 1916. Her obituary stated that she was 77 years of age. It mentioned that the coffin bearers were four postmen in uniform and as well as a large amount of people attending her funeral at Shrivenham church, many wreaths were sent including one from the Viscount and Viscountess Barrington. (Faringdon Adver 30/12/1916). And life was coming to an end for the Beckett Estate as it was broken up and eventually all sold off. The Old Post Office building was part of that estate and was included for sale by auction. The picture below is a clip from the catalogue of 1922. (See SHS N1512 for complete catalogue).

**Lot 33.**

*Coloured Pink on Sale Plan.*

The stone built and stone-slatted

**BUSINESS PREMISES**

Ordinance No. pt. 215 situate in High Street, Shrivensham, used as the Post Office, in the occupation of Miss Lock as a yearly Michaelmas tenant at a rent of

£15-5-6 per annum, tenant paying rates.

The accommodation is as follows :

Post Office, Sitting Room, Lobby and Pantry,  
Kitchen with Kitchener, lean-to Scullery with Pump,  
3 Bedrooms and 3 Attics,  
Timber and Tiled Wood House,

**LARGE PRODUCTIVE GARDEN,**

the whole embracing an area of about

**1r. 23p.**

There is a separate yard entrance from the street.

Water by pump from well.

LANDLORD'S OUTGOINGS—Vicarial title rent charge commuted amount 3/-.

The memories of local resident Bill Knapp, full name, Albert William Knapp, contain a lot of useful information. (SHS Listing N661). In an interview he recalled that Carrie Lock took over as Postmistress after the death of Elizabeth Butler, and the Electoral Register for 1923 listed Caroline Lock. She and her sister continued to run it until the Post Office was moved further up the high street in 1962, to where it is today. The Electoral Register for 1961 confirms that also. The premises however, No. 17 High Street, seems to have had multiple occupancy at times, as along with Carrie and Kathleen Lock, the Electoral Register for 1958 included at the same address, Richard, Percy and Gertrude Burrough as well as the Hammond family.



The present Post Office location since 1962.

We've covered 150 years of post in Shrivenham so far. Research continues to bring it up to a date as near to present as possible. If you can provide any further information please email us at [info@shrivenhamheritagesociety.co.uk](mailto:info@shrivenhamheritagesociety.co.uk)

The premises that is now called. *'The Old Post Office,'* (No 17 High St), is a Grade II listed building. The DofE wording: *17th century of colourwashed rubble stone and brick dressings with a gabled stone tiled roof and west side wall stone stack with set offs and brick cap. North front of two storeys and three bays with eight pane sashes to the upper windows, a similar sash to the right-hand ground floor window and a central polygonal glazed bow. Panelled and glazed door to the left-hand bay.*