



**DOYNTON
AND ITS**

POST OFFICE



August 25, 1989 sees the closure of the sub-post office at Doynton, which was first opened in 1877 and has remained in the hands of one family for these 122 years.

The postal system has grown up in the period since 1840, when a letter rate of one penny per half ounce to cover the whole of the United Kingdom was brought in by Rowland Hill; the weight for the money was later increased but the basic cost for letters remained at one penny until the end of the First World War in 1918.

So large an undertaking had to move slowly. The Post Office only set out, initially, to deal with letters and newspapers. Its offices were only in the larger towns such as Bristol or Bath and it was in the larger towns that the initial branch post offices appeared – that in Clifton appearing in 1846. The country had to rely on letter carriers on foot to make the deliveries. In 1863 the letters were carried out from Bath and delivered in the morning from 9.30 a.m. and the box was cleared at 2.40 p.m. These letter carriers, later to be called postmen, were provided with a scarlet uniform and boots once a year and with a waterproof cape every other year, however their pay could be as little as 7/- per week with no pension.

Doynton in 1863 still had no post office, Bath remained the nearest one, but we now wonder where the box was kept from which the letter carrier collected the return mail. It would seem likely that this was in a shop or perhaps less likely in an inn.

The earliest references to shops for Doynton come in the census returns and early directories. In 1841 no one entered 'shop-keeper' as a profession, although some may have done this part-time in the way that some farmers called themselves 'butchers' at times and had done this for over 100 years. It may be that, apart from fresh meat, flour, fruit and vegetables, available locally, all other items were bought on market day or purchased on commission by the carrier. By 1851 Andrew Russell, Hampshire born and bred, had moved into the village as carrier and grocer, providing a regular service into Bristol on Mondays, Thursdays and Saturdays. In later years the older generation remembered that the journey through to Bristol took about three hours. The return from the Cat and Wheel at 4.30 p.m. would have reached Doynton well into the evening and Andrew Russell must have left the shop at the top end of the High Street in Doynton largely to his wife, Mathilda.

They would have been in competition with Gabriel Amos, baker and grocer, at one of the two cottages on the west side of the mill buildings next to the mill wheel. They competed too with Luke Holder, formerly butler to the Rector of Doynton. Luke had married a fellow servant from the rectory and had moved to the two cottages next to the old Court Farm milking parlour, and now called Twain Cottage. Here he called himself labourer and grocer.

Three shops seemed adequate for a village population around 550 and this proportion remained for more than twenty years. In this time Luke Holder dropped out, Andrew Russell concentrated on his business as carrier, but Gabriel Amos was joined by two new men: John Amos, grocer and in 1868 by a third grocer, Job Lear, who may have taken over Russell's former shop.

Job was newly married, in Clifton, to Sarah Spicer and their eldest son was born in Doynton a year later. They had no apparent connection with the village, both belonging to families established in the North Common and Oldland Common areas of Bitton, where they were small farmers and coalminers. The Lear name occurs in the Bitton records back to 1697. A little later there were marriages to members of the Frankam and Bateman families; these names are some that are long established in Doynton. The Spicer name does not appear in the Doynton lists but it does appear in Wick from the mid-eighteenth century. It is in Wick that the clue to the Doynton arrival may lie.

When the newly married couple reached Doynton, Job set up in a cottage belonging to John Packer of Pucklechurch who, together with his brother James, a blacksmith of Wick had freehold property in Doynton High Street including tithe numbers 337,338,339. The Tithe Map describes the first two as being 'house and shop'. The brothers were the grandsons of John Packer, who had a general store 1775-1781 in Wick High Street, where now Virgo's the hairdressers is set up; during alterations a bundle of bills for casks of butter and treacle, for currants, raisins and rice was found stuffed on top of a beam. The Packer family held this property until recently. It would not be unbelievable that they should have used their family holding in Doynton to set up a branch shop in that village - perhaps using a relation or a local girl to look after it. There is a village memory that such a girl kept the shop before Job Lear appeared.

The first Lear shop was given a rateable value in 1871 of £2-10-6 per annum and on this they had to pay a church rate of threepence three farthings and it remained only a grocer's shop in Matthews' Bristol and District Directories until 1877. It was the next issue in 1878 that first mentions him as 'postal receiver'. That year seemed to have seen an expansion of rural postal services with post offices in Wick, Doynton, Dyrham and Pucklechurch joining the existing office in Warmley.

The Post Offices for Wick and Doynton are shown on the 25":1 mile Ordnance Survey maps of 1882. That for Wick coincides with our point of interest; it is shown as being next to the school on the site of Virgo's today. The grocer and postmaster there was Charles Nowell, who entered his 17 and 15 year-old daughters in the census of the previous year as 'letter carriers'. The Post Office in Doynton is shown at the top end of the row of cottages on the west side of the High Street opposite both the present site (see Fig 9.) and the Cross House. Job Lear's three sons aged 12,10 and 6 are still marked as 'scholars'. There are no built-in 'letter carriers' nor any people from other parts of the village who entered it as their profession. Indeed Kelly's Directory for 1879 whilst indicating Job Lear as a postal receiver states that letters still come through Bath. The letter carrier still arrived at 9.30 a.m. and left again a little later at 3.00 p.m.

It is to this period that village memories of the postman survive: his arrival was heralded by the blowing of a horn and the period between morning and afternoon bouts of activity was spent withdrawn to Bury Cottage where he worked as a shoemaker. The memories of the figure of the postman are warm and grateful; for most people in the village he did not bring any bills or today's credit card accounts with trash mail urging the borrowing of ten years' income. In those days the letters, if any, were from daughters in service or sons in the army, the letters were personal and this seemed to make the postman a part of the family. If the recipient could not read or write, and this was common in the older generation, the 'postie' would read the letter and write out a reply on the spot if it seemed vital. In the 1960s the village was not still illiterate but the postman, who did not enjoy walking, used his own old large American car to get around and still retained a personal touch in delivering mail, rejecting the pressures of time, consuming tea and conveying gossip: one father overturned his car at the news of his daughter's birth, Amos the Post helped him right it and the news of the incident was round the village within half an hour.

It would seem that the post office drew in most of the village trade, for within a few years no other shop was mentioned in the directories. In fact they did exist, but only by catering for the children of the village: Tilly Mitchell at Vine Cottage is remembered fondly not only as a supplier of sweets but also as an eccentric character driving a gig into Bath, another such was the wife of George Whale who lived in the end of the village called 'White Bonnets' in the cottage where Luke Holder had his shop. Her sweets however were not home made but bought in and such is the taste of children they may have liked them all the more for not being home made. But undoubtedly for the boys of the village it was the fireworks that she sold that were her greatest attraction for them. These were sold in the front room that was reached through the entrance corridor with a half-door or stable door on the left, across which the purchases were made.

At the post office Job Lear was doing well. In 1871 he had been a tenant to John Packer for his shop only valued at £2-10-6, but by 1881 he possessed property valued at £51-4-3, by 1893 this had only risen a few pounds but he also tenanted Brook House farm and some glebe land with a total rateable value of £179-10-0. His wife, Sarah, at some point, inherited considerable property in Oldland Common. His aim was to establish his three sons; from 1897 his eldest son, Francis, was in Rookery Farm and later moved to Nichols Farm. In 1899 Job Lear decided to retire from the post office which he handed over to his second son, George Edward. Job had built for himself and Sarah a retirement home called Fernbank, perhaps named after the Methodist Chapel in Clifton. Nevertheless he still sought activity for himself and so together with his youngest son farmed at Bottoms Farm just over the boundary into Abson.



Fig 1. Clarence Lear in 1939.



Fig 2. Adelaide and Philip Lear in 1970.



Fig 3. The Garden Front of Brook House was built for Edward Gale in the 1850s. The members of the Lear family were farming tenants here from 1889-1906. Job, Francis and Sarah are seated behind Henry on the left and Edward on the right of the picture.



Fig 4. Clarence Lear in 1989.



Fig 5. Doynton Post Office Counter, 1989.

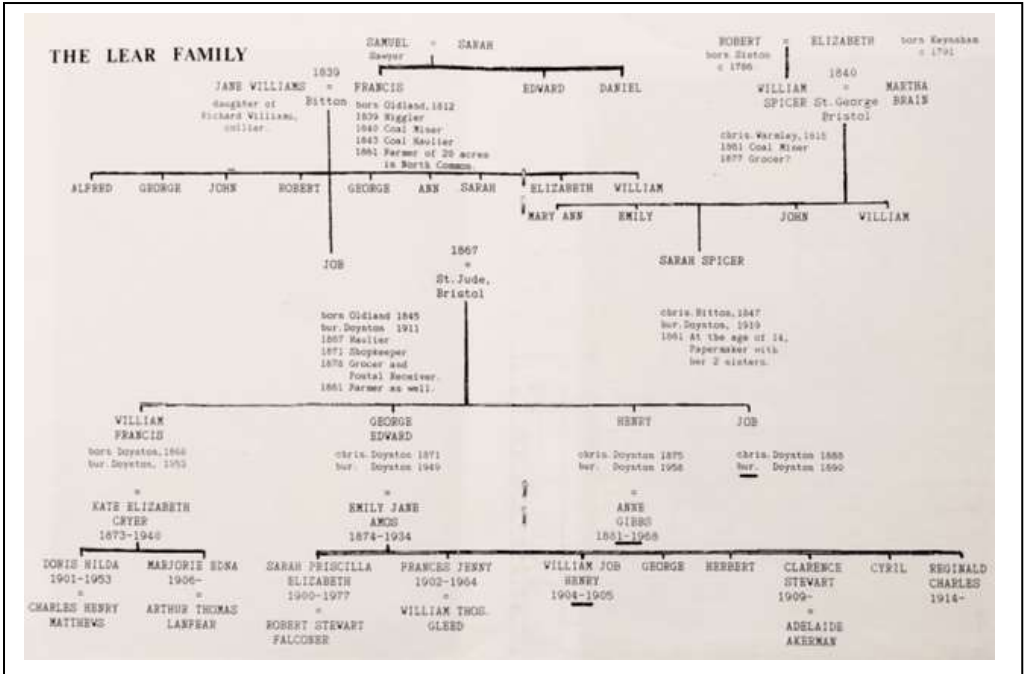


Fig 6. Lear Family Tree.

Brought forward		L. 9. 0	
65	Laz Job	131. 11. 0	10. 0
66	Siley W ^r		
67	Little iboury	153. 0. 0	12. 9
68	Marshall Henry	17. 0. 0	1. 5
69	Matthews Henry	87. 8. 0	7. 3
70	Mattews Arnold	23. 1. 0	2. 0
71	Manning W ^r Ellen	4. 8. 0	5
72	Mitchell Tom	16. 16. 0	1. 5
73	Manning's Albed	4. 0. 0	4
74	Nichols W ^r	29. 16. 0	2. 6
75	Rehman John Jesse	127. 5. 0	10. 11
Parish of <i>Dopton</i> Total 6			

RATE				
NAME OF OCCUPIER	NAME OF OWNER	Description of Property Rated	Name and Situation of Property	Estimated Rates
1	2	3	4	5
Jones George	School Trustees	House & Garden	Village	11
Jones George Sub	Self	"	Waterloo Lane	8
Jones James	Mrs Sarah Rowley	"	"	18
Edman Richard Thomas	William Davy Esq	Land	Heavy Gate Farm	105
King William	Self	Garden	High Hill	10
Liles Samuel	Self	"	Waterloo Lane	1. 6
Liles Job	Self	Shop	Bury Hill	1. 6
"	Self	Land	Village	4
"	Self	Land	Village	29
"	Self	"	Village	3. 7
"	Self	"	Village	6
"	Self	"	Village	1. 16
Little Edward	Rev. Edw. G. Bury	"	Brook Hill Farm	56
Lock Harry	Edward Esq Esq	Garden	Road end Cott	2. 2
"	M. George	"	"	1. 2
"	W. Gals Esq	"	High Park	9
Above: The Church Rate for 1886.				179
				2. 9

Fig 7. The Church Rate for 1886 (above) and The Poor Rate for 1893 (below).



Fig 8. The Post Office Exterior, 1989.



Fig 9. Afternoon Collection: in 1969 the afternoon collection coincided with the return of the school bus. Dominic Ryan, Giles and Matthew Austin and Philip Lear.



Fig 10. Telegram Boy: this is probably on the road between Doynton and Dyrham. In 1905 telegrams were brought out by Alfred Nowell from Wick P.O. on his bike. He also made the afternoon collection of mail and took it on to Warmley. Either he is excited by the rural setting or the thoughts of 'Sitting on a Five-bar Gate' have turned his head too fast. Cameras of the period could not cope.

However shortly before the turn of the century Doynton Post Office had been gutted by fire, leaving a roofless ruin that was entered by youngsters in a daredevil spirit and to which their elders gave the name of 'Starling Villa' or 'The Hotel'. Its front door with its slot acting as the village letter box still remained but a new post office had to be built. This was done opposite the old site and next to the old barn of the Cross House Farm which was now a beer house. This is the site that has been in use for the last century.

Its opening coped with the recently introduced Parcel Post and received a great expansion in postal business with the introduction of the picture post card from 1894. Doynton soon boasted its own series of picture postcards: the church, the rectory and Doynton Rocks taken by Thomas Peter Fisher, who had recently moved into the village.

All this was dealt with by Edward Lear who followed his father in aiming to do his work as thoroughly and as profitably as possible; farmers sometimes settled their bills in kind and when he closed the shop he was not closed for business. If anyone wanted some special item, he would aim to obtain it the same day or the following day. To look at stock piled in a room the size of a modern single bedroom, covering the goods of a grocer, greengrocer, chemist, ironmonger and confectioner was to think that the whole of creation was there. He fetched the grocery supplies himself for many years in a pony and trap from HH&S Budgett of Nelson Street, Bristol, wholesale grocers. This was the firm that had started in Kingswood, growing up in the area dominated by the Cock Road Gang in the early nineteenth century, the same area as that from which the Lear and Spicer families had come. They shared too a tendency to Nonconformity in religion; Samuel Budgett was a strong supporter of Wesleyan Methodism to which many Lears in Oldland had belonged. In Doynton Edward supported the Congregational Chapel, playing the organ there. In her turn his daughter played the organ for Doynton Church before she moved away to teach in Liverpool. This move towards the establishment and towards establishment education came too with a similar generation of Budgetts.

Rationing in the aftermath of the Second World War was still in force when George Edward gave up the P.O. in 1947 after 48 years. He was followed by his son Clarence who returned from working with BAC. Until that war he had found scope for activity and interest within the village, being one of the stalwarts of the then Doynton Cricket Club together with Percy Perryhan and Arthur Amos, but in the winter he was a keen skater - even in the harsh winter of 1965 he was still organising tobogganing and skating on the mediaeval fish ponds in Poor Close. Freedom came with a motorbike and he used to take part in the scrambles on Tog Hill. These were organised by the Douglas motorcycle firm and were competed in by both motorcycles and by Lea-Francis cars. The route ran from the Cross, out past the Rectory, up Toghill Lane, through the tunnel under the main A420 and past Roger's Patch.

The Church Choir, where he was choirboy and choirman for nearly 40 years, was left only under pressure of family commitment. Fifteen years as secretary of the Village Hall and some years on the Parish Council are a measure of the boredom and burden of local democracy and of one man who was prepared to face them.

From the phoney peace just before the Second World War the post office had been joined by a public telephone booth, red-painted, cast-iron, Gilbert Scott designed and remembered by many as offering shelter to courting couples or as keeping the rain off the early delivery of Sunday papers.

From 1910 the Old Age Pension has been paid in post offices, but the range of outpayments has grown over the years, until the money has to come by Securicor van and to be protected in the office by a ceiling-high glass and aluminium framework that rises up to the bacon hooks still projecting from the ceiling. The decoration of the walls is indeterminate, so much is it and the security framework covered by government notices, exhortations, postal charges for Christmas mail to the Maldives - even the Electoral Roll has to hang sideways over an electric cable cover. When the office closes they will have to supply a special van just to take away the paper.

We shall miss the doorbell.

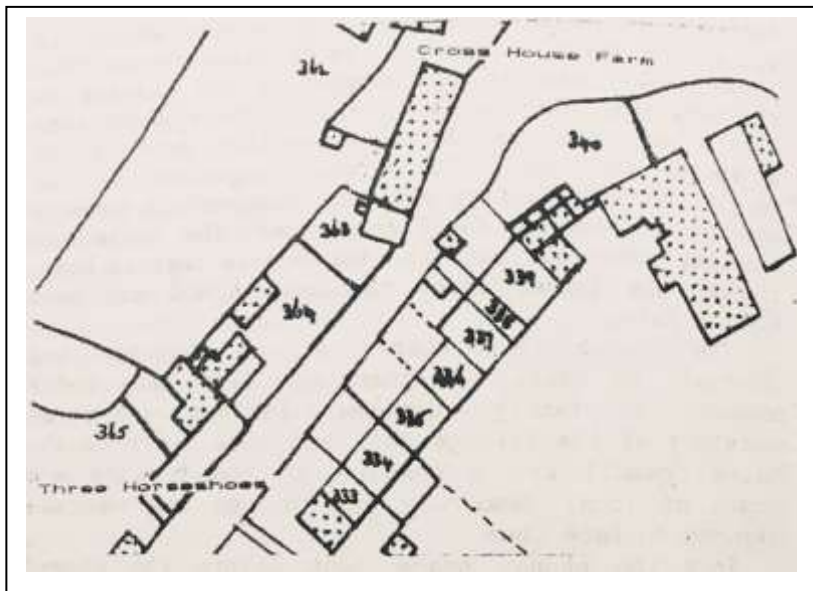


Fig 11. The Street, Doynton in 1839.

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