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The Old Post.

I don't know when your house was first used as the Post office — the earliest post-mistress I have heard of was Matilda Froome, as mentioned in the 1891 Census Returns. (I do not have the 1881 Returns, but a search in them might reveal an earlier post-mistress.) Unfortunately the 1891 Returns do not give details of most of the individual addresses of the families enumerated. A very large part of Inkpen's population was just classed as belonging to "Great Common".

It is probable that Mr. William Thomas Homer was the next Post office official. (I give the Census entries for Miss Froome, the Homers, and Mrs. Ward & Miss Edwards on a separate sheet.) — It is interesting to note that Mr. Homer had been born in Cleobury Mortimer, in Shropshire. His father was said to have been a Wesleyan Methodist minister, and as such would have been transferred from one "Circuit" to another at fairly regular intervals. So Mr. Homer and his parents may have come from Cleobury Mortimer when he was still quite young, and they may have moved to other areas before being sent to the Newbury Circuit. We have no record of Mr. Homer's education, but it was obviously above that of ordinary village children of those days. His future wife, Emma, and their daughter, Sarah Rachel M., were both born in Inkpen. It seems that he must have settled in Inkpen in the early sixties. (1860's, of course.)

When the Education Act (c. 1870) came into force, Inkpen already had a school, which had been built by Rev. John Butler and was largely financed by his family. When the new "Board School" was built, and opened in 1874, an official "Correspondent" had to be appointed, and Mr. Homer was given the post. The feeling between Anglicans and Nonconformists was very strong in those days, and Mr. Homer must have had very good qualifications to have been appointed to a school which was still run on largely 'Anglican' lines.

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Indeed, right up to the time of Rev. Henry Butler (appointed in 1896) the school was named as "St. Michael's" on a Certificate awarded to a pupil, and signed by the Rector himself.

I think Mr. Homer must have been post-master until Mrs. Ward was appointed early in the First World War. She was the elder daughter of Mr. & Mrs. James Edwards, and had married Mr. Frank Ward, who was a partner with his elder brother John in the Bakers' and Grocers' business on the Common. Mr. Frank Ward was expecting to be called up for military service, and bought your house so that his wife and children would be sure of a home in the event of his death. As Mrs. Ward became post-mistress, it looks as if Mr. Homer had lived there before this. Miss Edwards said an old P.O. form had been found when some structural alterations were made - it had slipped down a crack, and no doubt Mr. Homer had searched for it in vain! (I never saw the form, and don't know what happened to it.)

Mr. F. Ward was killed, fairly early in the War, and Mrs. Ward was left with two children to care for - Rona would have been about six years old then, and Ron possibly four. Mrs. Ward was a tender, gentle lady, not really fit for a business life (though she showed great strength & patience later, in long years of illness). Her younger sister Winifred went to live with her at The Old Post, and she took over some of the day-to-day Post Office work.

Rona went to Southlands College for Teacher-training, and was eventually Headmistress of a London Infants' School. She came home most weekends, & returned on Sunday evenings. Ron joined his grandfather and uncles at the Sawmills; as the older members died, he in time became a Director. (I believe Rona did too, and Helen, widow of Arthur.)

Neither Rona nor Ron was married. Ron died in the late ⁽³⁾ sixties or very early seventies. Rona lived on ^{at} the Old Post after her retirement, in failing health, and died in a Nursing Home in 1976.

Mrs. Ward herself (1876 - 1946) was bedridden for some years before her death, and presumably Miss Edwards was appointed in her place. They had wonderful help from Mrs. Eileen Thomas (nee Tilley), who continued to give support until Rona's death. The house was left to her, I believe.

There was one other member of the Edwards' family who lived at the Old Post for some time - the patriarchal James, founder of the family and the business. He lived to be well over 90 years; he needed a good deal of care and attention in his later years. His wife had died many years previously, in 1925.

There were many tragedies in the family, including the deaths of the twins, Winifred and Wilfred, in 1966. "Mr. Will" was killed in a sad accident on the Bath Road in March of that year; his sister was involved in a car accident too, in mid-summer. Neither was to blame for what happened. They had never spent a birthday apart in their 76 years.

By this time, the Post Office had been transferred to Mr. Kenneth Prior, and the business was carried on at his bungalow (on the other side of the road). When he was too frail to continue, his daughter was appointed in his place. She had married Mr. Whitlock, and they had opened a Grocery Business; the Post Office was transferred to the Grocer's shop, and Mrs. Whitlock gave the village 21 years of service. When she died in 1980, the new owners of the business were already installed - Mr. and Mrs. Kirk and Mr. Kershaw. They did not stay long, and in 1984 the business changed hands once again. Mr. and Mrs. Wrightson were no more successful than the Kirks had been, and left in 1987. They were "accused" of being unkind to pensioners, who would now have to travel to Hungerford or Kintbury. But the grocery business was no longer viable. And Inkpen lost its last shop.

To answer some of your questions —

Yes, in Miss Edwards' time there was a 'Shop' at the P.O. — limited in many ways. I expect sweets were sold (can't be sure), also stationery and small items of haberdashery — sewing cotton, mending wool, needles, etc. It could not have been very profitable. I should think it 'closed' when Mrs. Whitlock's shop opened.

Apart from Mrs. Home's post as School Correspondent, and occasional work such as that of Census Enumerator, I don't think any postmaster or mistress had any extra job — except for Mrs. Whitlock and the shops.

Mrs. Erben Thomas sometimes helped in the P.O., as she did with every side of "The Old Post's" life — house, nursing, cooking, gardening, etc.

Mail was brought out from Hangerford by a postman who rode a bicycle. After delivering round the village, he went on over to Combe. Having delivered mail there, he had to wait till it was time to clear the pillar-box, and then retrace his journey back to Hangerford, via Inkpen. (Combe did have some mail in those days, as there was a SCHOOL of 20 or so pupils, in charge of Miss Effie Richards. The school rose to newspaper fame one year, when its 20 pupils included 3 or 4 pairs of twins!) For many years the postman was Mr. Frank Tidbury. I'm told that he pushed his bicycle up the hill, so that he had an easy ride down, into Combe. But it was also said that in very bad weather the bicycle was left hidden among bushes at the foot of the hill, and retrieved on the homeward journey! (Those Were The Days ??) In time Mr. Tidbury retired, and was replaced by a Mr. Scarlett; he in turn was replaced by a Mr. Rogers, an Inkpen man. After that it was probably a "mechanised" journey. At one time (after the Second War) it was suggested that a larger P.O. van could carry passengers as well as mail. But the proposal was never carried out.

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One other duty at the P.O. was running the Telephone Service. Inkpen P.O.'s phone - Exchange! - was in the kitchen, behind the P.O. itself. It was in the area which you thought could have been 'added on'. It was enclosed in a case, rather like that of an old-fashioned wall clock, and there was much turning of handles and whirring of bells, etc. There were telegrams too, which had to be delivered - at 6d. a time (a small fortune in those days). Miss Edwards often walked over to Combe with a telegram; later, when she acquired a little Lewis motor-cycle, that gave her transport. (On NOT - for the engine wasn't very powerful, and the hill was steep.) One of the paths "up and over" used to be known as "Postman's Path"; it probably still is. Postmen who used it must have walked.

Post Office Road was out of my area early in the century, and I don't think I knew it at all till shortly before the First World War. We lived in Lower Green then, and didn't often stray from it. Even after the Second War, the Rector appealed in his Parish letter for a good attendance at a Fête on the Playing Field, pointing out that folks from the Lower Green did not know those living on the Common - and vice versa, I think the only other houses near yours would have been the old thatched cottages on your side of the road. The ones opposite are much more modern.

I never heard of the Old Post being extended, but it is possible; the kitchen was narrow, about 6 or 7 ft. I haven't been inside the house since the early sixties. The door from the road was used only as entrance to the P.O., so any possible extension could have included the entrance door at the S.W. side of the house.

I don't think the photo of the Homers was taken at your house; the rather "primitive" porch looks more like the entrance to the cottage where they lived after Mr. Homer retired. It was one of three adjoining cottages along Pottery Road.

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They were known as "Tea-tree Cottages", as large shrubs of the "Duke of Argyll's Tea-tree" grew there. For some reason this was a fairly common plant in Muckpen's gardens. The Homers lived in the cottage farthest from the road (- Miss Carter can give you a definite position). They were pulled down some years ago, and a new house built there; it must have a wonderful view. Owing to the War and to family circumstances, Mrs Carter was out of the village from 1941 to 1951, and I was away from c. 1922 to 1944, and again left in 1972; so there are some gaps which we can't fill.

I don't know what the Old Post's garden is like now, but it was always a great joy to Mrs. Ward and Miss Edwards, and later to Rona. Mrs E. was especially fond of blue flowers; I remember a patch of gentians of which she was very proud. At the Harvest Festival services, she always included a little vase of blue flowers (not so common at Harvest time) among the Reds and Yellows. And after she died, we kept up the custom in her memory as long as the Chapel was used. Mrs. Ward's favourite perfume was lily of the Valley, and she must have loved the actual lily-blossoms as well.

I have been away from Muckpen for over 20 years now, and many of the "natives" have died in that time. I'm afraid I can't give you the names of any who could help you in your search - all the names seem those of strangers! And as you have already lived in a village, you will know the wisdom of "Making Haste Slowly" - village folk tend to "clam up" when asked too much (or what they consider too much!) Your deeds and other documents will give you dates, etc. - a framework on which to hang these "rambling remarks". As Mr. Will Edwards would remark at the end of a meeting, "Friends, Tempus is still fugitting!" So I'll finish.

Best wishes. E. A. Martin.

Since writing the previous pages, I've had a very unexpected reminder of Inkpen!

This morning (Feb. 9) I received a letter from an old friend - she is not Berkshire, and has never been to Inkpen. She now lives in an Abbeyfield House at Lyme Regis, and in her letter she told me of a new resident, recently come to the House. In talking about their previous homes, the newcomer said she was born in the Newbury area, and had worked for many years in the Office at the Inkpen Sawmills! - and had lodged with a Mrs. Ward and a Miss Edwards, who kept the Post office!! Her name was Townsend, and it was perhaps 60 years ago, or thereabouts. So I would have been away from Inkpen for much of her time. When I left home, Mr. and Mrs. James Edwards gave me a Bible; Mr. E. pointed to the neatly-written inscription, and said, "I got the girl in the Office to write it for me!" "That girl" must have been Miss Townsend.

How very strange that this should have come to light before I posted to you.

Extracts from 1891 Census.

(The whole of the Civil Parish of Inkpen, comprising Kirby House, Upper and Lower Green, Totterdown, Sadlers, Spray. (Ham Spray).)

(I may also add that the larger part of the Parish is included in what is commonly known as Great and little Commons. W. T. Homer.)

The entries below are all from the "Great Common" area; very few entries have individual addresses. E. A. M.

Name	Position in Household	Age	Occupation	Place of Birth.
Goodfellow, Ann. Frome, Matilda.	Head Daughter	82 60	Living on own means.* Sub-postmistress.	Inkpen. Inkpen
Edwards James " Annie " Nellie " Arthur " Bertie " Winifred " Wilfred	Head Wife Daughter Son Son Daughter Son	41 38 14 9 4 1 1	Carpenter and wheelwright. Scholar "	Inkpen Kintbury Inkpen Kintbury Kintbury Inkpen Inkpen.
Homer William Thomas " Emma " Sarah Rachel M.	Head Wife Daughter	65 70 28	Clerk of School Board	Cleobury Mortimer; Inkpen Inkpen.

(* It is surprising how many elderly ladies are classed as "living on own means"!)

(See over.)

The Edwards Family.

Ellen Clementina E. 1876 - 1946

m. Frank Ward.

Children - Dorothy Rona 1909 - 1976

Ronald 2 or 3 yrs. younger.
d. late sixties or early seventies.

(Neither was married)

Arthur James E. 1882 - 1957.

m. Helen -

Children - Joan m. but widowed.
Audrey Single.

Albert Cornelius Job E. 1887 - 1948. *

m. 'Queenie' Carpenter.

Children - James, Donald, Derek
and twins, Anthony & Annette.

Wilfred Harding E. 1890 - 1966.

m. "Effie" Richards (Combe).
No children.

Winifred Anne Harding E. 1890 - 1966.

Single.

* The only living descendants will be those of Albert and his wife; all have left the village, and some have already died.

Names underlined are those who actually lived at The Old Post.

The twins, Wilfred & Winifred, died in the same year but on different occasions - Wilfred in March 1966 and Winifred in late June or early July - both from road accidents, not of their own making.

James
Edwards

1848 - 1941

m.

Annie
(Harding?)

1852 - 1925



Lines from Miss Rachel Homer to Mr. and Mrs. F. Carter

We think of the past days of dear Auld Lang Syne
Sweet memories of dear ones our hearts to entwine
Of services gone by in the good old days
With greetings and meetings and music sweet lays.

We can fancy we hear their loved voices once more
And join in the carol or hymn as of yore
And fancy we hear our dear Dad recite
And Mothers sweet smile our hearts so delight.

Good health be your portion good fortune attend
With wealth of Gods blessing until your lifes end
May music's sweet song be a guest at your board
To swell the glad chorus to Jesus our Lord.