

THE HISTORY OF
BATHFORD'S
POST OFFICE
FROM 1846 TO 2008



The Bathford Society

Compiled by
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THE HISTORY OF BATHFORD'S POST OFFICE

OPENED: 1846 - CLOSED: 2008

The Old Post Office (No. 12 Church Street)

The national penny post began in 1840 and, by the 1850s, John Scott was running Bathford's Post Office at No. 11, Church Street alongside his business as florist and nurseryman.

In 1870 there was an appeal to provide a velocipede at a cost not exceeding £8, for Charles Nathaniel Ruddock, rural postman for Bathford and Batheaston in recognition of his good services and anticipation of increase in his duties with reduction of postal rates. A velocipede in 1870 was the first type of pedal-driven bicycle, the pedals being attached to the large front wheel. Popularly known as a 'bone-shaker', it was, in the event, purchased for £5.10. 0.

A man with a long career with the Bathford post office was Henry Matthews who, in addition to being a shoemaker, was in 1860 described as the letter carrier. Ten years later his title was rural post messenger and in 1886 he became, simply, the postman. He enjoyed this now familiar and respected title until he retired in 1894

From 1872, the postmaster was George Pittman, painter and decorator at No. 12. A very small extension to the house accommodated the Post Office and the business continued in very cramped conditions for many years until in 1907 the landlord, Col. Skrine built a more commodious extension

to serve as Post Office, Telegraph Office and Newsagents shop.

The business then continued for many more years, latterly under the Pittman's daughter until it finally closed in 1960 and No. 12 became a private house again.



Church Street. Bathford

45 Post Office	I	George	PITTMAN	Head	M	31	House Painter (emp 3m, 1 by)
		Emily I.	PITTMAN	Wife	M	35	Postmistress
		Anne I.	PITTMAN	Dau		8	Scholar
		Percy G.	PITTMAN	Son		7	Scholar
		Agnes E.	PITTMAN	Dau		5	Scholar
		Harry R.	PITTMAN	Son		4	Scholar
		Edith A.	PITTMAN	Dau		2	
	Georgina L.	PITTMAN	Dau		1		
46 Devises Rd	I	James	BLAKE	Head	W	64	Gardener
		Mary	BLAKE	Dau	U	25	
47 do	I	Henry	MATHEWS	Head	M	48	Letter Carrier
		Elizabeth	MATHEWS	Wife	M	49	
		Edwin	MATHEWS	Son	U	28	Stone Sawyer (cutter)
		Arthur	MATHEWS	Son	U	19	Gen. Labr.
		Augusta	MATHEWS	Dau	U	13	Scholar

A 'wrap', forerunner of the envelope, with Penny Black stamp for Mr William Briscoe of Briscoe House, Church St. But addressed to his solicitor's office in Bath. It is dated 1840 which makes it one of the earliest letters.



Mr Henry Matthews, by trade a shoemaker, delivered letters and telegrams for 34 years from 1860 to 1894. His 'boneshaker' velocipede had pedals attached to the front wheel and cost £5-10-0.



With the extension provided by Col. Skrine.

From our copy of the Bathford Directory , which runs from 1854 to 1940, we find that it lists only two family names. From 1854 to 1871 the Scott family ran the Post Office and he was also a florist. In 1872 George Pittman, a painter, took over the Post Office and his family continued to run the business up to at least 1940. In fact we know from personal memories that it was run by Miss Pittman up to 1960 when the business moved to No. 2 Church Street

Telegrams and Telegraph Service

The Post Office at No. 12 Church Street was also a telegraph office where brief messages could be transmitted (originally in Morse Code but later via a modified typewriter) to any other telegraph office in the country for immediate delivery, usually by a boy on a bicycle.



HARRY R. PITTMAN,
Boot Maker,
POST OFFICE, BATHFORD.

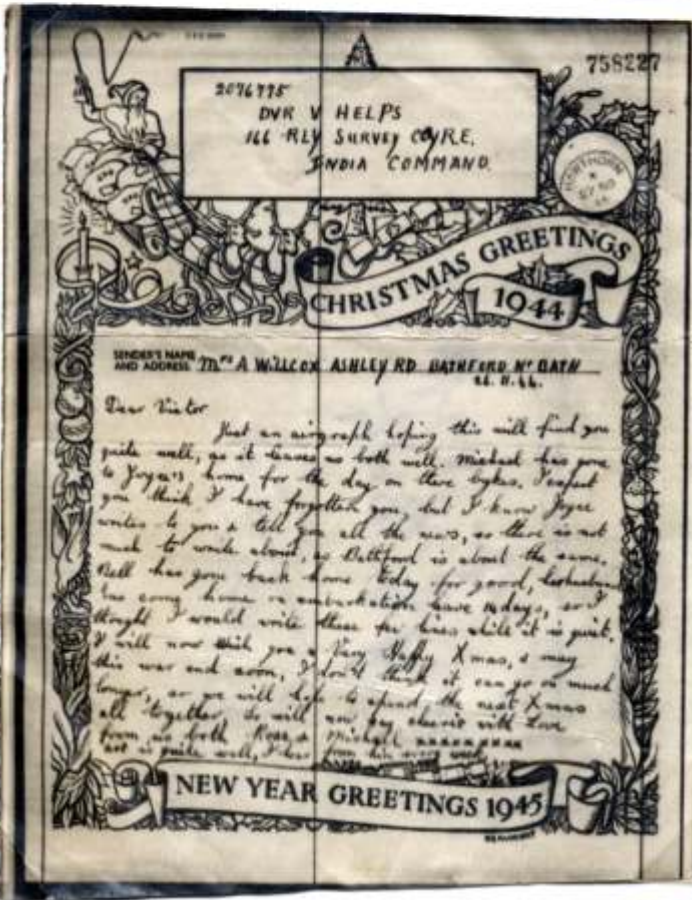
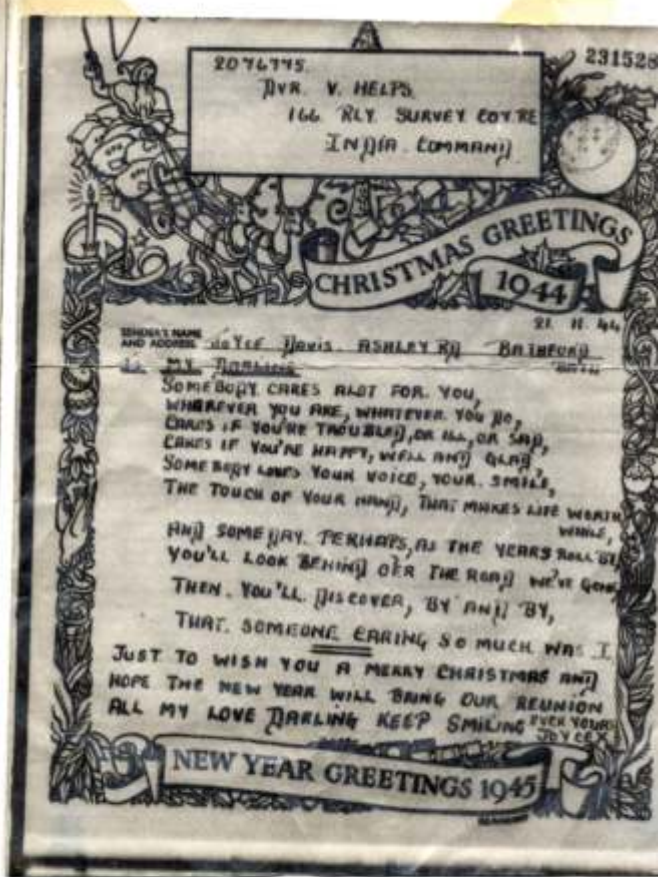
BOOTS & SHOES MADE TO ORDER ON
THE SHORTEST NOTICE.
ALL REPAIRS PROMPTLY ATTENDED
TO.



The telegraph antedated the telephone by 40 years and was still in use until after the 1939 - 1945 war. For ordinary people without telephones, the arrival of a telegram was dreaded as possibly bringing urgent news of illness or a death, - but they were used on happy occasions too.

The pole carrying the metal wires, which conducted messages from Bathford, stood by The Inn.





Examples of Telegrams - provided by Joyce Helps.

Telegrams sent from
 Bathford Post Office
 June 7th 1947
 For wedding of
 Joyce & Victor Hays

Charges to pay
 RECEIVED

POST OFFICE
 TELEGRAM

Prefix Time handed in. Office of Origin and Service Instructions. Words.

2. 0 Bathford

From _____ m

To _____ m

Mr and Mrs. Hays Parish Room
 Bathford

No. OFFICE STAMP
 BATHFORD WINDS
 47

POST OFFICE
 TELEGRAM

Prefix Time handed in. Office of Origin and Service Instructions. Words.

2. 33 Bath

From _____ m

To _____ m

Charges to pay
 RECEIVED

2. 34 m

From _____ m

To _____ m

POST OFFICE
 TELEGRAM

Prefix Time handed in. Office of Origin and Service Instructions. Words.

Bathford

No. OFFICE STAMP
 BATHFORD WINDS
 47

POST OFFICE
 TELEGRAM

Prefix Time handed in. Office of Origin and Service Instructions. Words.

Bathford

No. OFFICE STAMP
 BATHFORD WINDS
 47

Parish Room
 Bathford

all you wish

Griffin

No. OFFICE STAMP
 BATHFORD WINDS
 47

For free repetition of doubtful words telephone "TELEGRAMS ENQUIRY" or call, with this form at office of delivery. Other enquiries should be accompanied by this form and if possible, the envelope

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Together, members of the Pittman family kept the Post Office at 12 Church Street for 88 years. Miss 'Maggie' Pittman was Post Mistress until she died in 1960, and is still remembered in the village.

In 1960, when Miss Pittman died, the Post Office moved into an existing general store at No. 2 Church Street, where it was run by Peter Boltwood, and then by Peter Ford.



An early 1900's photograph of the shop at No 2 Church street - long before it became the Post Office.



The Post Office in its new location.





More pictures of the Post Office at No. 2 Church Street.



Meanwhile, the old Post Office transformed into this.

In 1984 the Post Office and shop at No. 2 Church Street was taken over by Iqbal and Masuma Suleman.

These photographs show Iqbal and Masuma and their young family running the shop and Post Office.





Children's heaven!



The Sulemans at work



In 1994 the Post Office moved to its final home when it moved into what had formerly been The New Inn on Bathford Hill. The Inn provided more spacious accommodation, both for the business and for the family



Removing the signs and blocking up the Post Box at No. 2 Church Street.





Installed at
The New Inn



**Final days: Iqbal and Masuma on the 15th July
2008 - the day the Post Office closed**

In July 2008, after 162 years' service to the local community, the Post Office authorities ordered that Bathford Post Office, along with many others, be closed permanently as an economy measure. The sign was taken down and the equipment removed. On the same day, Iqbal took honourable retirement as Post Master, having served for exactly 25 years.



No longer an Inn or a Post Office, - but becoming part of the village shop for a new phase of its life..



Personal memories by Mrs Joyce Helps and Mrs Jean Law

My memories of Bathford Post Office and Miss Maggie Pitman (Postmistress)

In the late thirties should you need the local postal services you would go to 12 Blurck Street open the wrought iron gate, open the door when a bell would ring to make aware that some one needed attention, when after a short while a spritly gentle lady Miss Maggie Pitman would appear to serve you with stamps stationary, weigh your parcels, and take and get telegrams delivered. Airgraphs were received to be processed to go to the troops overseas during the war. I forgot to mention postal orders in great demand, as poor people in those days did not have bank accounts hence no cheque books.

Before the war years my late husband Victor and his brother Charlie would go to sleep at the post office as there was nine in their family, plus Mum & Dad who lived in a small cottage in Ashley Road until they moved to 4 Council Houses (now 29 Ashley Road P.S. When the telegraph boy came to the house it was usually to inform you a loved one had been injured or died, sometimes to recall service men on leave to proceed over-seas to the war zone but my telegrams were to congratulate us on our wedding day. After 54 years of happy married life I give thanks for those good wishes, which started at The Old Post Office 12 Blurck St. Bathford on June 7th 1947.

Joyce Helps.

Childhood recollections of Bathford Post
Office at No 12. Church Street

(now the Old Post Office)

My frienda Betty Cannings lived at No. 18. Ch/st.
We spent many hours playing hopscotch,
skippings, bowling hoops, along Ch/st at
the end of the 1930's & early '40's.

Only an occasional car then, at that time
most private cars were laid up (on blocks)
for the duration of the war.

If there was a telegram to be delivered
Miss Pitman who owned the Post Office
would come out and beckon us to her.
If it was to be delivered within the village
we could earn 1½d between us, if further
afield we were summoned to fetch one of
the older girls who lived in the hill and
owned a bicycle and she could cycle to
Warleigh, Kingsdown or Shockerwick for 3d.
I remember the Post Office as being quite small
with a bell on the door so Miss Pitman could
come from her home at the rear when she
heard a customer enter. I also recollect
the smell, it was dry and papery a bit
like being in an old bookshop.

Jean Law

IQBAL AND MASUMA SULEMAN

- An Appreciation -

Iqbal and Masuma Suleman are both of Indian origin but born in Uganda. When Iqbal was 15 he decided to follow a friend and come to England to improve his chances educationally. He made the three week journey from Mombassa to Calais by sea alone and then by train to London. He then joined his friend in Bath and attended the Ralph Allen School for a year, and then moved to 'the Tech' where he took courses in geology, botany and maths. Following that he remained there as a lab. Technician in the Building Department, testing tensile strengths of stone and other materials. After further more specialised training, Iqbal qualified and worked as a radiographer at the Royal United Hospital, and it was there that he met Masuma, herself a radiography trainee and then a qualified radiographer in the same department.

Following their marriage in Bath in 1974, and before they had children, they worked as radiographers at Lister Hospital in Stevenage; St. Georges, Tooting; St. Hellier Hospital, Carshalton and in Saudi Arabia before deciding that, after all, Bath was best.

On their return they found that Bathford Post Office at No. 2 Church Street was on the market and offered both long-term secure employment for them both and also accommodation above the shop for themselves and their two small children, Selim and Sabina. Accordingly, in 1984 they moved in and Iqbal became Bathford's new Postmaster while Masuma ran the shop.

Although they remained at Church Street for ten years, the accommodation there, both for the business and for themselves, was extremely cramped and when the New Inn closed and came on the market in 1994, they seized the opportunity to move into the more spacious premises for the shop and Post Office on the ground floor, and for themselves and their family above.

Closure of Bathford's Post Office by the Post Office authorities on the 15th July 2008, though a very great loss to the village, has now allowed Iqbal to retire after 25 years of service. He and Masuma now look forward to a well-earned rest and the leisure to spend more time with their family, including their first grandchild born this year.

We thank them both for their long service to the village community and wish them well in their retirement.

Fae Hall
July 2008

FOOTNOTE

This report is based on a wall display created for the 2008 Bathford 'History Weekend'. It was prepared to mark the closure of Bathford's Post Office. It also marks the retirement of our Post Master, Iqbal Suleman, after 25 years of service.

