

HISTORY OF THE POSTAL SERVICE IN PEMBURY

Jane Grooms February, 2021

1: High Street/Upper Green Post Office circa 1878 to 1934 (approx. 76 years)

The original Post Office was situated where the Barber's/Nanna's coffee shop is today (February, 2021).

It was established on 21 September, 1834 under the administration of Tonbridge postal town. It was incorporated as a Money Order office on 1 October, 1863 and a Savings Bank later the same year on 28 December. It was designated a Telegraph Office in 1870 and taken under the administration of Tunbridge Wells the same year. *Source: Robin Sampson, British Postal Museum & Archive, 2013.*

George Edward Neale

In 1858, Melvilles Directory records George Edward Neale as postmaster.

Stephen Neale and Eleanor Neale

The 1871 and 1881 Censuses show Stephen Neale and Eleanor Neale as postmaster and postmistress at the High Street Post Office. Stephen Neale is recorded as postmaster in the 1882 Kelly's Directory.

Frederick W.A. Poxon and Charlotte Poxon

By 1892, Kelly's Directory lists Frederick W.A. Poxon as postmaster. Mrs Charlotte Poxon is postmistress in 1903/4.

Henry George Towner and Alice Minna Towner

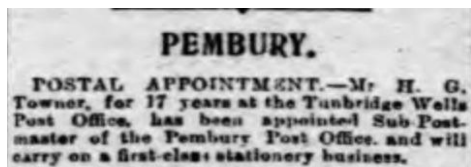
From 1908, Henry George Towner becomes postmaster at the High Street/Upper Green Post Office.



Image: circa 1910

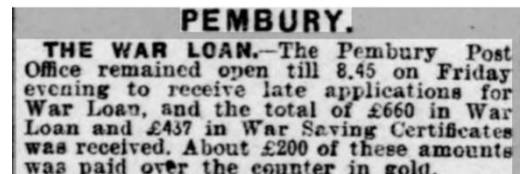
"Standing at the door are Mr and Mrs H Towner, who were post master and mistress for many years. The first postman on the left is Nicky Stiles. The next two are unknown but the fourth is E Norrington. Sid Standen is the telegraph boy ready to deliver telegrams by bicycle. The lady behind him, Mrs Reeves, was the telephone operator. Both of these services worked from this office..." Pembury in old picture post cards by Mary Standen.

The 1911 Census records Henry George Towner born 1878 in Tunbridge Wells as a Post Office Pensioner. His wife Alice Minna born 1876 in Seal, Kent is shown as the sub-postmistress. They have a servant, Alice May Thrift born 1895 in Pembury.



The Courier, 1 January, 1909 (Left)

The Courier, 23 February, 1917(Right)



The 1919, 1924, 1927 and 1931 Kelly's Directories show Mrs A.M. Towner as the postmistress.

Henry Towner died on the 29 September, 1936. An extract from his obituary in the *Courier*, 9 October, 1936 stated:

"Mr Towner started his career at the Pantiles Post Office moving from there to Grove Hill road and Vale Road as the new premises were acquired. It was while loading mail vans at the Vale Road Office that he met with an accident which forced him to abandon his career and disabled him for the remainder of his life. In 1908 he was appointed sub post-master at Pembury, but his strength proved unequal to the work and 18 months later the license was transferred to his wife who held it until four years ago."

Alfred Ernest Tolhurst

In 1932, Alfred Ernest Tolhurst became postmaster at the High Street/Upper Green Post Office.

An article from 28 September, 1934 describes the suddenness at which the Post Office had to vacate the High Street/Upper Green premises:

"An urgent matter before the Committee was with regards to the Post Office at Pembury. On this, Mr H.J. Smith observed that since the last meeting the Post Office at Pembury had had to vacate its premises very suddenly and as the new buildings (which were approved at the last meeting) will not be completed for a month or two, a temporary building has been erected and occupied near the new site. It was a matter of great urgency and could not await approval by the Committee without depriving the village of its Post Office. The builder has undertaken to remove the temporary structure immediately on completion of the new building; after consultation with the Chairman of the Rural District Council permission was given. The Rural District Council Chairman's action was confirmed, but surprise was expressed that circumstances could arise whereby a village could be deprived of its Post Office on only a week's notice being given."

Pembury did have another Post Office that was open in 1934 i.e. the Lower Green Post Office -see later so the village was not without a Post office whilst new permanent premises were being built.

2: 29/47 Hastings Road Post Office – 1935 to 2018 (84 years)

From 1934, the Upper Green Post Office moved to Hastings Road with Kelly's Directories of 1934 and 1937 recording **Alfred Ernest Tolhurst** continuing as 'sub postmaster'.

K&S Courier 23 April, 1937

Attention was drawn by Mr. HAYWARD to the unsatisfactory condition of the much-used footpath from Henwood's Green to Pembury Post Office, and the matter was referred to the Committee.

A map from 1938 shows the Hastings Road Post Office where 47 Hastings Road is today. However, Kelly's Directory in 1938 records the address as 29 Hastings Road. This number changes to 47 circa 1959 – see later. The map and the order of the 1939 register showing the Post Office after Springfield and number 30, is evidence that 29 Hastings Road in 1934 to circa 1955 is the same location as 47 Hastings Road today. It is assumed that Hastings Road was re-numbered in the mid-1950's.

Alfred Ernest Tolhurst died in December, 1938. Article: (right) *Sevenoaks and Kentish Advertiser*, 16 December, 1938

A LOSS TO PEMBURY. — The death occurred at the Kent and Sussex Hospital on Sunday of Lieut. Alfred Ernest Tolhurst, who has been the local postmaster for the past six years. Mr. Tolhurst, who was 56, had been in failing health for about two years. He joined the Army when 17, serving for 15 years in India with the Royal Horse Artillery. He also served with distinction throughout the Great War, and on his retirement he took up poultry farming, and subsequently became Labour Exchange manager at Wadhurst. He leaves a widow and two sons.

Arthur Williams

The 1939 Register records Arthur Williams as a sub postmaster, tobacconist and confectioner and his wife, Elsie, is sub postmistress at 29 Hastings Road. Kelly's Directory shows Arthur Williams as sub postmaster in 1940.

An article in the *Courier*, 2 August, 1946 reports on the death of GW Gadsen who was "employed at Pembury Post Office until his retirement". Research shows his name to be **George William Gadsden** of 11 The Mount, Pembury.

Alan Hayward

Kelly's Directories from 1948 to 1955 record Alan Hayward as 'shopkeeper and Post Office' at 29 Hastings Road.

From 1959, Kelly's Directories show the Post Office at 47 Hastings Road with A.B. Haywood as 'shopkeeper and Post Office.' The Pembury Parish Guide of 1966 indicates that A.B. Haywood as still operating the Post Office.



The image on the left shows Haywood Stores and is described as the Post Office, Hastings Road, Pembury.

Ronald L. Diplock

An article in The Courier from 10 April, 1970 refers to Ronald Diplock of 47 Hastings Road and R.L.P. Diplock is recorded as 'shopkeeper and Post Office' in the 1972 and 1974 Kelly's Directories.

John and Linda Turnbull ran the Post Office on Hastings Road until 2010. Originally, their storage basement was used for sorting mail and each post person had to sort out their own round of letters.

The image on the right is from 1999.

Below the narrow window on the right is a Ludlow Wall Letter Box painted black which still exists as of February 2021. See Post Boxes page under Buildings and Landmarks on this website.



Sheela and Sunil Kulkarni

From 2010 to 2016, Sheela and Sunil Kulkarni ran the Post Office in Hastings Road.

The image on the right shows the corner door removed and a new door fitted to the side with a ramp for disabled access.

**Mr and Mrs Patel**

Mr and Mrs Patel took over the running of the 47 Hastings Road Post Office from 2016 but in 2018 the Post Office was closed and moved to 37 High Street, Pembury (see below).

Image of 47 Hastings Road, February, 2021.



The old Ludlow Wall Letter Box below the small window still exists as of February, 2021.

3: 72 Lower Green Road Post Office 1887 to 2005 (118 years)

Pembury had another Post Office at 72 Lower Green Road at the junction with Maidstone Road and Church Road. The Post Office was established here in 1887 under the umbrella of Tunbridge Wells and became a Money Order and Savings Bank on 1 July 1890 (Source: Robin Sampson, *The British Postal Museum and Archive*, 2013).

Kelly's Directory of 1882 shows a H. Beeching, Grocer and Draper. The 1891 and 1901 Censuses show **Henry**



Beeching as a Grocer, Draper and sub postmaster. The 1901 Census shows his daughter Amy Katherine as a Telephonist. Henry is listed as post-master in various Kelly's Directories from 1903 to 1927. The postcard on the right shows Beeching Stores with a Post Office sign on the lower wall to the right of the door and a post aperture to the right of that. Beeching Stores is listed as grocer and Post Office in the 1934 Kelly's Directory.

C.H. Rhead

C.H. Rhead is recorded as 'grocer and Post Office' in the 1959, 1961, and 1963 Kelly's Directories. Although not proven, this may have been the same person as Charles Henry Rhead who was a shopkeeper at 103 Powdermill Lane in 1968.

Alan Colin King

From 1965 to circa 1974, A.C. King became postmaster (Kelly's Directories). An article from The Courier on 19 March, 1965 reports that Alan Colin King of 72 Lower Green Road "*having for the last six months carried on the trade of calling of a Grocer, intend to apply...for the grant to me of a...Licence to sell Beer, Wine and Spirits...*" King's Post Office and Off-License is listed in the Pembury Parish Guide of 1966. An article from the 7 January, the same year, advertises for a "*young intelligent girl 16-17 wanted to train for Post Office duties. Apply Pembury Lower Green Post Office Pembury.*"

Note the Wall post box set in a pillar of bricks to the right of the shop. See Post Boxes under Buildings and Landmarks on this website.



An article in the Pembury Village News of Spring 2003, reports the Post Office and shop changing hands late in 2002 from **Brady's** to be occupied and run by **Mark and Emma Southgate**. Mark as new postmaster retained 'Iris' as an employee who had worked there for thirty years.

Image of 72 Lower Green Road, 'The Old Post Office', February 2021



Sadly, the Lower Green Post Office closed in 2005 and the building was converted to a house called "The Old Post Office" with the shop front demolished in circa 2010 and turned into a front garden. The pillar box was removed from next to the building. A pillar box exists on the pavement on the other side of the road at the top of Church Road but it is not known as of February, 2021 whether it is the same one that existed to the side of 72 Lower Green Road when the Post Office closed in 2005.

4: 37 High Street Post Office – Current

From February 2018, Pembury's only Post Office moved from 47 Hastings Road to 37 High Street, Pembury (Village News) run by Mr and Mrs Patel.

