

Arthur Dubbins and the Local Post Office in the 1940s

During the war years the Post Office in Partridge Green was run by Ada and Cyril Fisher. The mailbags arrived at 5.30am by van from Horsham and there were always plenty of parcels, especially around December. The postmen would sort all the post and tie it into bundles with official P.O. string, then load up the bicycles and set off on their rounds. Arthur Dubbins' (northern) round started in the High Street and Littleworth Lane—once these were done he would reload his bike at the Post Office and set off to Church Road and towards West Grinstead as far as the cottages north of Black Bridge, back up Needs Hill, along Mill Lane and down to Blanches Farm. After another reload he would head off north to Lancasters, Swains, past the reservoir, out to Parkminster Farm and St. Hughes Charterhouse. Delivering here was a novel experience with the ringing of the large doorbell to be answered by a cheerful Brother of small stature and ginger beard. There were often parcels for St. Hughes as they did book binding. From here he went to a group of houses at Parkminster and returned to Morley and Woodside Close, ending up at the small sub P.O. at the Corner House run by Mrs. Hart.

The postman also carried keys for the letterboxes and was responsible for emptying them on route. Another responsibility was C.O.D. (cash on delivery). The difficulty in getting the right money was sometimes a challenge, as the P.O. did not provide a float.

Early in the war this round was covered twice a day but later on the afternoon delivery was stopped, although people were able to call at the P.O. to collect their mail. (I recall going to the P.O. on several afternoons when I was expecting my School Certificates results.) Even though the afternoon delivery was dropped, Arthur still had to cycle the route to empty the letter boxes not only of his round but also that of the other postman (Frank Sayers from South Street did this round, which Mr. Chase, also from South Street, took over when Frank had to retire early), which added Bines Road and the Lock Estate to his journey.

However, the job did not end with the second delivery and/or collection. All the envelopes had to be franked with a hand stamp and ink pad to be bagged up in time to catch the late afternoon train to Horsham. The postmen were then free to go home but they bore the responsibility of keeping their cycles in good running order.

Through the war a delivery on Christmas Eve and Christmas morning was continued and I remember helping out. I delivered to Posbrooks Farm one Christmas Eve; the farmer said he would have some apples for us if we went down on Christmas day so we duly went there although there was no mail for him! He proudly gave us one apple each. Such "generosity" was scarce and many people were pleased to give a Christmas box or a glass of wine and a mince pie.

Arthur's long service of 49 years to the post office was noted in three ways: he was awarded the Imperial Service Medal, and when he finally retired in 1957 he received a letter from no less than Ernie Marples, the Postmaster General (see right). Then the people in the village honoured him with the presentation of a cheque for £35 (about £1000 today) and Mrs. Dubbins received a box of chocolates. The presentation was made by Mrs. Marshall of Swains Farm, which was on the edge of his very extensive round.

Arthur Dubbins was a well respected member of the village and his reliability was legendary, as I well know from some of the comments I used to get when I did his job for 6 weeks in the summer of 1947 while he took his accumulated leave, not having taken a break for 3 years.

**Doug Penniford,
with contributions by Johnnie Fisher and Derek Dubbins.**