

HISTORY OF WOKING'S POST OFFICE

Before 1864, all the post for Woking would have been delivered on foot from Ripley, where the stage-coaches from London and Portsmouth would have brought it to the Talbot Hotel. The postmaster in Ripley was James Mansell.

The post office was removed to the High Street in Woking Village (opposite the White Hart, where No. 177 now is)¹ in 1864. The mail now came by train to Woking Station and was sorted for distribution in the post office. The following year a sub-post office was built near to Woking Station, at No. 1 High Street where the NatWest Bank now is. In 1869, James Mansell moved to the post office at Woking Station.



Figure 1. Site today of post office in 1864

In about 1872, the post office moved from the High Street to Walton Road, right on the junction with Chertsey Road². After James Mansell died in 1875, his son, Jesse, succeeded him as postmaster.

In 1877, the Woking Station branch took over from the Woking village branch as Woking's main post office. It soon proved hopelessly inadequate and, in 1882, Jesse Mansell commissioned the building of a new post office and postmaster's house, in Chertsey Road, directly opposite the old one, at a cost of £398 10s. The architect was William F Hooper and the builder was William J Butt. The new building opened for business in October 1882.



Figure 2. New post office

Between 1864 and 1890, the number of letters per week passing through the office increased from 3,000 to 16,000. On 1st August 1883, the Post Office started a parcel post service.

Jesse Mansell retired in January 1891 and was replaced as postmaster by David Glover, who was promoted from his post as postmaster at Chatham. The turnover

¹ *Surrey Advertiser* 11 January 1890; In around 1920 it moved into London House, on the corner by the roundabout

² Many records at the time refer to it as being in Chertsey Road

of postmasters from this time forward was quite rapid with the average length of stay being 5 years (see table at end).

The new town of Woking was now expanding rapidly. A new post office was planned in the development of Station Estate (the triangle formed by Chertsey Road, the Broadway and what was later Duke Street), at 4 Bank Buildings. This was described as 'much-needed' as early as December 1887³.

In 1893, the existing post office was demolished to allow for the building of the Woking Liberal and Radical Club and Institute (later successively replaced by the Woking Assembly Halls and the Plaza and Gaumont cinemas). The new post office building was not yet ready and so, on 14th May 1893, the post office moved to a temporary home in 16 Bank Buildings (later the International Tea Company Stores).

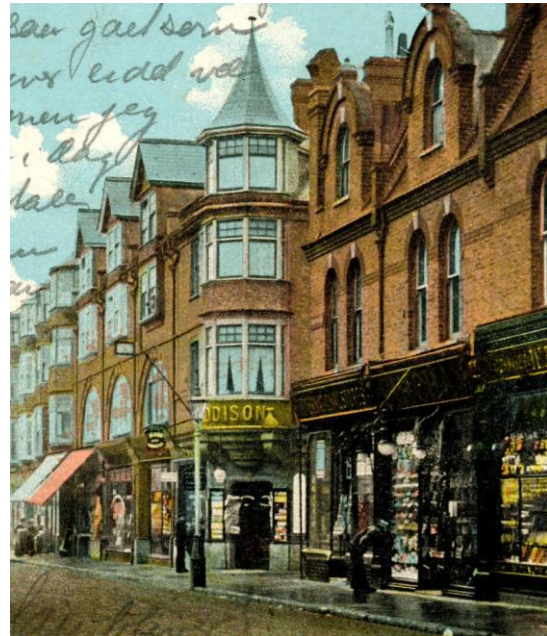


Figure 3. International Tea Co. Stores c1900

No. 4 Bank Buildings was built on plots 2-4 of Station Estate (shown in Figure 4).

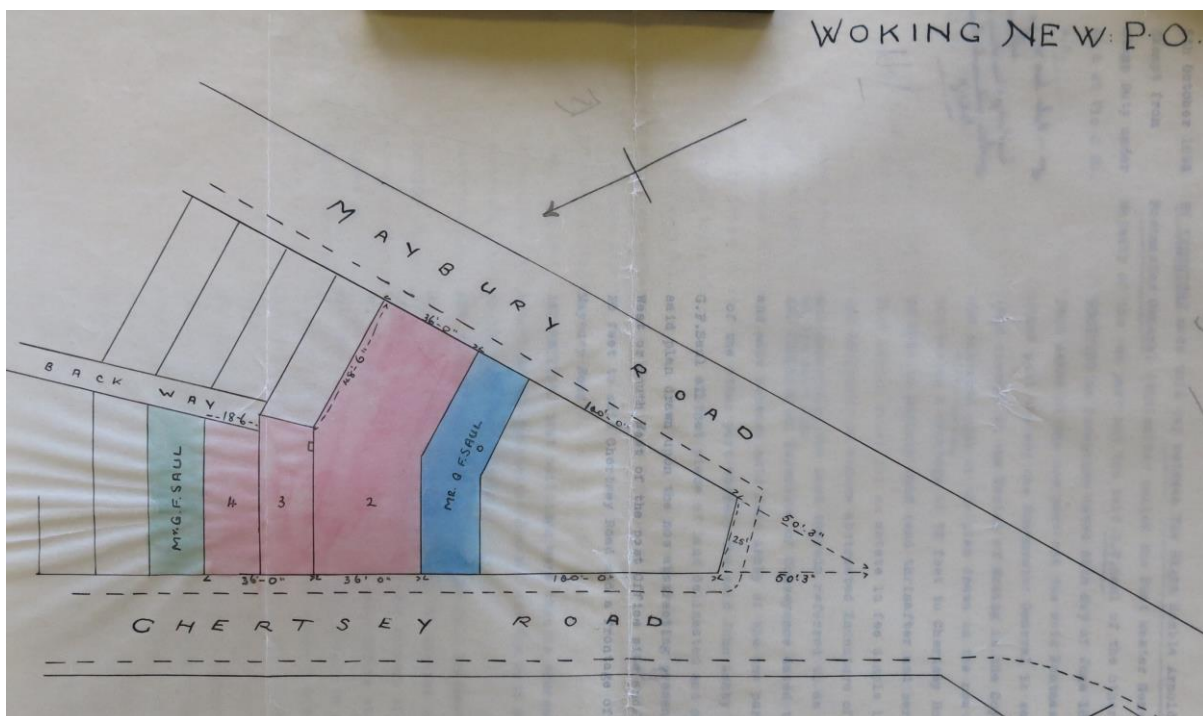


Figure 4. 1894 Plan for new Post Office (red)

³ Surrey Advertiser 17 December 1887

In 1895, the post office finally moved into its new home. It comprised a two-storey section on plot 2, with a three-storey section incorporating a grand entrance on plots 3 and 4. It had entrances on Maybury Road (now the Broadway) and Chertsey Road.

When David Glover moved on in 1901, he reflected on the changes in his ten years as postmaster. Staff had increased from 40 to 120; letters from 16,000 a week to 110,000 and parcels from less than 1000 per week to 20,000.⁴

The post office building was initially also used for sorting the mail. As the town continued to grow, larger facilities were needed for this function and a new sorting office was built south of the railway in about 1911^{5,6,7}. In 1935 the sorting office to the south of the railway was replaced by a new building (the current one) on the same site.

In about 1950, the Chertsey Road building was remodelled for exclusive use as the telephone exchange (which had previously been located at the rear of the Post Office).

The post office moved into temporary accommodation in 46 Commercial Road⁸, awaiting the building of new premises (again).

In the late 1950s, the old Council Office building was demolished and the new home for the central post office was built on the site, fronting on to what became Market Square. The new post office opened on 6th April 1960.



Figure 5. Post office 1898



Figure 6. Temporary site of post office

⁴ *Surrey Advertiser* 24 August 1901

⁵ *Woking Post Office. Sorting Office. Erection*. H. Gough, 10 December 1910, National Archives WORK 13/443

⁶ Because of Woking's excellent rail connections, its sorting office also handled mail for a large part of the region

⁷ It would have been at this time that the telephone exchange was constructed in the rear of the building (Under the Telephone Transfer Act 1911 The National Telephone Company was taken over by the General Post Office (GPO) in 1912)

⁸ In what was previously the Rendevouz Restaurant and later Robinsons (briefly) and Methvens bookshop



Figure 7. Post office 1999

The Market Square office closed in 2008 and the post office moved into the W H Smith's store in Wolsey Place. The Market Square building was demolished in 2015, prior to the Victoria Square development.



Figure 8. Post office 2001

Pre-WWII Woking Postmasters			
Name	Dates	Previous post	Next post
James Mansell	<1851 – 1875	Ripley	<i>Died</i>
Jesse Mansell (son of James)	1875 – 1891	Assistant at Woking	<i>Retired</i>
David Glover	29 Jan 1891 – 20 Aug 1901	Chatham	Banbury
Sidney Righton	1901 – Nov 1904	Normanton	Middlesborough
John Sparkman	1 Apr 1905 – 1906	Wigan	<i>Retired</i>
Arthur George Turner	Apr 1906 – 1911	Lewes	In 1914 became postmaster at Woodham
Amos William Prichard	1911 – 1920	Stroud	
Harry Ernest ⁹ Austen	1920 – 1928	Finchley	Huddersfield
Maj Hutcheson Campbell Black	1928 – 1934		Chester
Walter Betteridge	1934 – 1937	Yarmouth	<i>Retired</i>
Charles Robert Reynolds	Jul 1937 – Jul 1940	Burton	Worcester
Horace Clifford Potter	1940 –	Stroud	

⁹ In January 1920, Digby Harwood, postmaster at Newark, was appointed as postmaster at Woking. For some reason he did not take up the appointment and a year later transferred from Newark to Rochester. Harry Ernest Austen was appointed postmaster at Woking.