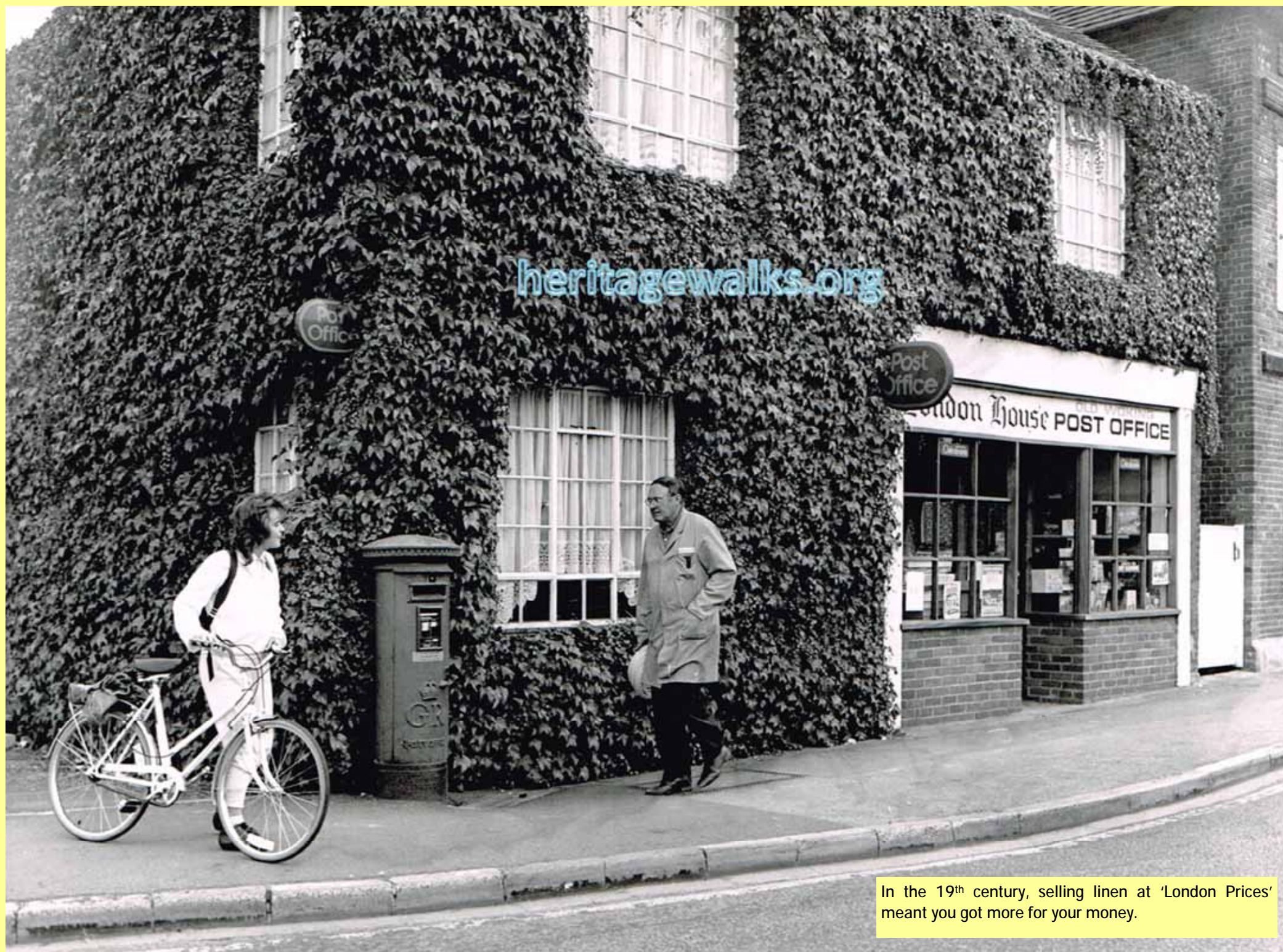


# ARE YOU BEING SERVED?

Iain Wakeford 2014



I have often been asked why 'London House' in Old Woking was so named – was it because the stagecoach from Woking to the capital stopped outside the White Horse Hotel opposite? No the answer is that the building, now a restaurant but previously the village post office, was once a drapers and in the drapery trade apparently to sell goods at 'London prices' meant that you were giving your customers the best possible deal. The practice appears to date back to the mid 17<sup>th</sup> century when London drapers offered their customers slightly more material for their money than their country cousins, although whether that was true by the time the Old Woking shop opened up is not known!

The building appears to have been built as a timber-framed house probably in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, but very little remains (if any) of that structure today. When it became a drapers is not certain, although a Walter Kensett, draper, is listed in the census of 1851 as living on the site together with a housekeeper and William Jenner, described as a 'drapers assistant'.

The 1851 Post Office Directory actually lists him as a draper and clothier, with Stephen Thatcher also being recorded as a draper in the town, and Robert Bedford, a clothier, giving him some competition.

Kensett was still there in 1861, listed as a draper, clothier and outfitter, with the 1871 census having him as a linen draper (with a Harry Prescott as his draper's assistant).

Kensett had obviously moved on by 1881 and we don't know what happened to the shop until 1891 when Francis Muggeridge is recorded in the census on the site.

We do know that in 1881 there were two other draper's shops in the area, but whether London House was the shop of Joseph Laker or Edwin Rowland we don't know (what route the enumerator took around the village is unclear).

By the 1882 Kellys Directory Joseph Laker was the collector of taxes in Goldsworth, so it may well be that Edwin Rowland (then a grocer and draper) may have been at London House in what eventually became Old Woking.

Mr Muggeridge continued to run the drapers and outfitters until the early 1930's, followed by a Mr Gardener, J.C. Aker, and then in late 1950's or early 60's Mr Allen, who took on the role of the village postmaster as well as running the drapery shop.

Before becoming a cycle shop and then a garage in the last century this was Horsell's Post Office run by the Spooner family.

In Horsell another drapers shop also doubled up for a time as the village post office, run from the building later known as Benstead's Cycle Shop and Garage.

The building apparently dates from about 1831 (the date being carved into a brick on the side wall), with a William Spooner, a shoemaker, being recorded there in the census of 1841.







By 1871 (aged 71) he is recorded as a draper and bootmaker, with his 50 year old wife Sarah, 26 year old daughter Fanny (listed as an accountant) and his 22 year old daughter Sarah Elizabeth who was recorded as a draper's assistant.

William presumably died sometime before 1878 as in that year the Kelly's Directory records his wife as the postmistress in Horsell receiving letters from the sorting office in Woking three times a day and dispatching them to town once in the morning and once in the afternoon.

Mrs Spooner continues to be recorded as the postmistress and draper until the late 1890's when her daughter Sarah Elizabeth takes over, successfully running the shop until the 1920's when Archie Benstead converted the building into his cycle repair shop (and motor garage), after the post office moved first to Archie Claydon's shop in South Road and then to Mr Brownjohn's shop near the Crown Inn in the High Street.

By then there were numerous drapers in the Woking area and almost as many post offices, with sub branches listed in Woking at Brookwood; Goldsworth Road; Guildford Road; Knaphill; Maybury (Lavender Road); Mayford; Old Woking; St Johns; Sutton Green; Walton Road; Woodham and Wych Hill.

Most have long since moved or closed completely, apart from Mayford's and Wych Hill's (pictured below).

POST OFFICE.—Mrs. Sarah Spooner, receiver. Letters received from Woking station at 6.45 & 10.15 a.m. & 5.40 p.m.; dispatched at 8.50 a.m. & 7.30 p.m.; & on sundays received at 6.45 a.m.; dispatched at 10.50 a.m. The nearest money order & telegraph office is at Woking station

Entry from the 1882 Kelly's Directory, showing the frequency of deliveries and collections from Mrs Spooner's shop.







## MARTIANS DESTROY MAYBURY'S POST OFFICE

**T**his building, on the corner of Sandy Lane and Lavender Road at Maybury, was once a Post Office (hence the pillar box).

It achieved worldwide fame in the 1890's with the publication of H G Wells' novel *The War of the Worlds*. In it, as the Narrator is returning

from Leatherhead to his house at Maybury Hill (just after the Martians have begun their destruction of Woking), Wells records 'at the corner turning up towards the post office a little cart, filled with boxes and furniture, and horseless, heeled over on a broken wheel.' He goes on to note 'a cash box had been hastily

smashed open and thrown under the debris'.

The cash box no doubt came from Harry Mitchell's shop (the sub-postmaster at Maybury when Wells was writing the story). I wonder what he would have thought about his property being treated in such a way in the novel – if he ever read the story that is!

