

# A History of the Post Office in Newick, Sussex



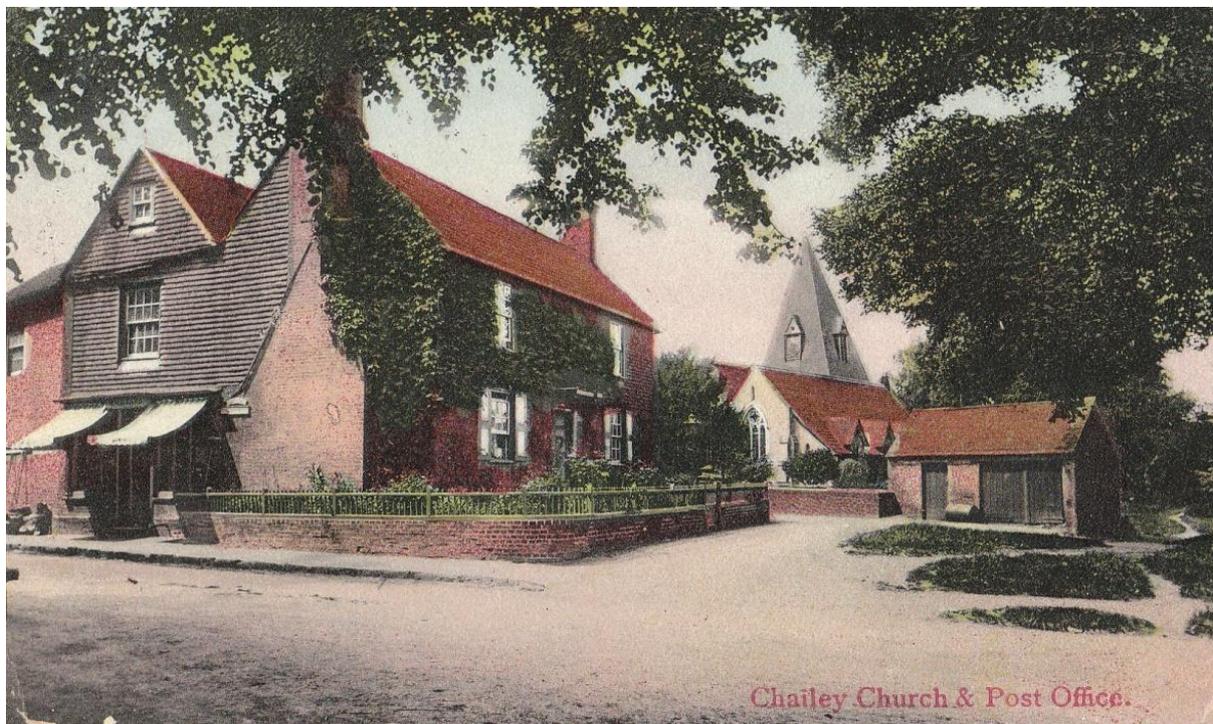
The Newick Post Office September 2019

Tony Turk

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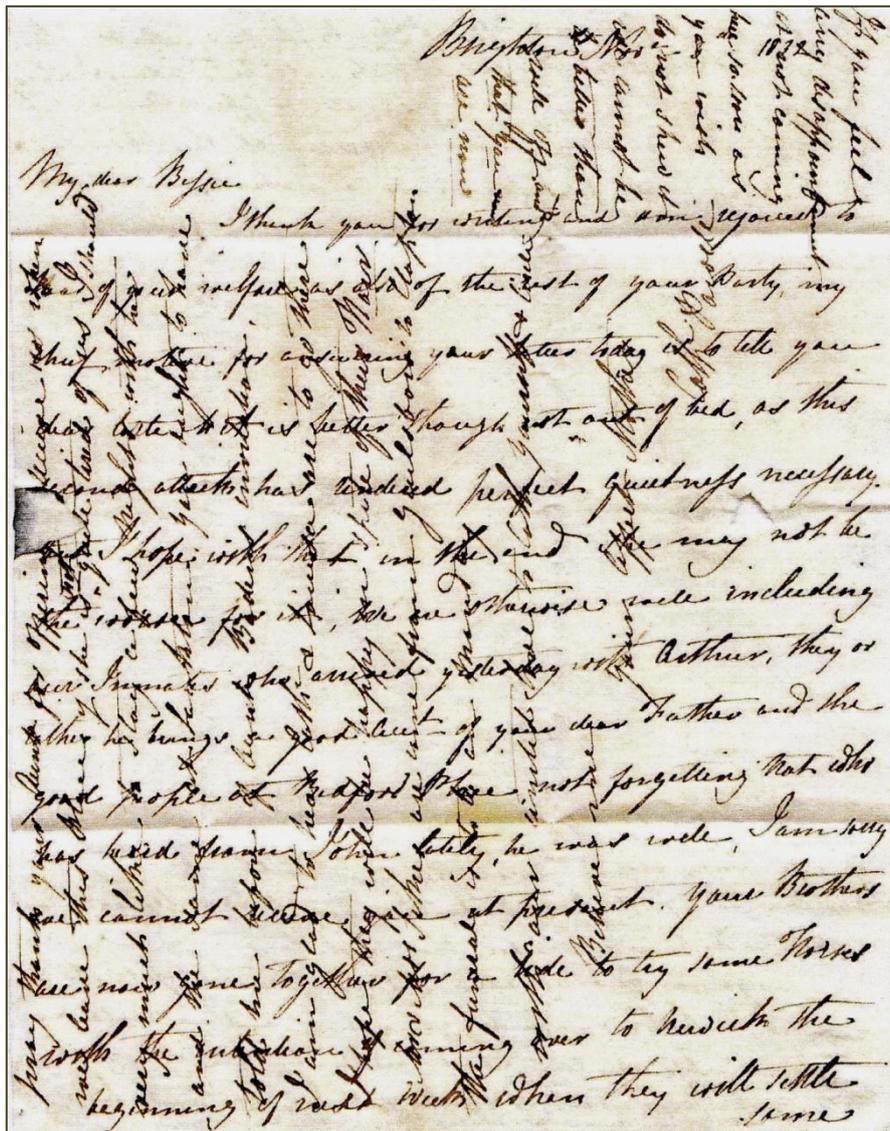
In 1839 the *Pigot and Co Directory for Kent, Surrey and Sussex* includes an entry for 'Chailey, Barcomb and Newick', stating that the post office for these villages was at Chailey, with Thomas R Beard as the postmaster '...letters from London arrive (by foot post from Lewes) every morning at half-past nine and are despatched every afternoon at half-past five'. So, Newick did not have its own post office at that time in the 1830s.

Below is a postcard photograph of the Chailey post office (about 70 years on from the 1830s) when it was still being run by the Beard family.



Chailey post office on a picture postcard with a 1907 postmark

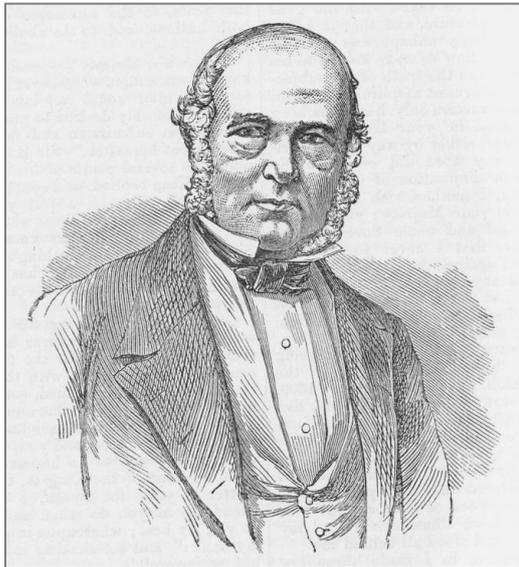
Below, is an 1830s manuscript letter sent from Brighton to Newick, written by Catharine Powell to her daughter, in a common 'cross-writing' style with text in two directions on the same page (to avoid two sheets of paper with increased postal cost). The letter, sent in November 1832, includes the words..... 'My dear Bessie, I thank you for writing ...your brothers are now gone together for a ride to try some horses with the intention of coming over to Newick the beginning of next week...Your Affectionate Mother, Catharine Powell'.



An 1832 letter sent from Brighton to Newick

1840 saw a revolution in the method of sending letters throughout the country, which followed the recommendations of Rowland Hill. A uniform rate of one penny per letter was adopted for any inland distance, being prepaid by means of a postage stamp. Before the introduction of this new postage method, each

person on average wrote only three letters in the course of the year. This soon increased. Below is an old engraving of Rowland Hill, together with the 'penny black' stamp which was used when the new system of postage was introduced.



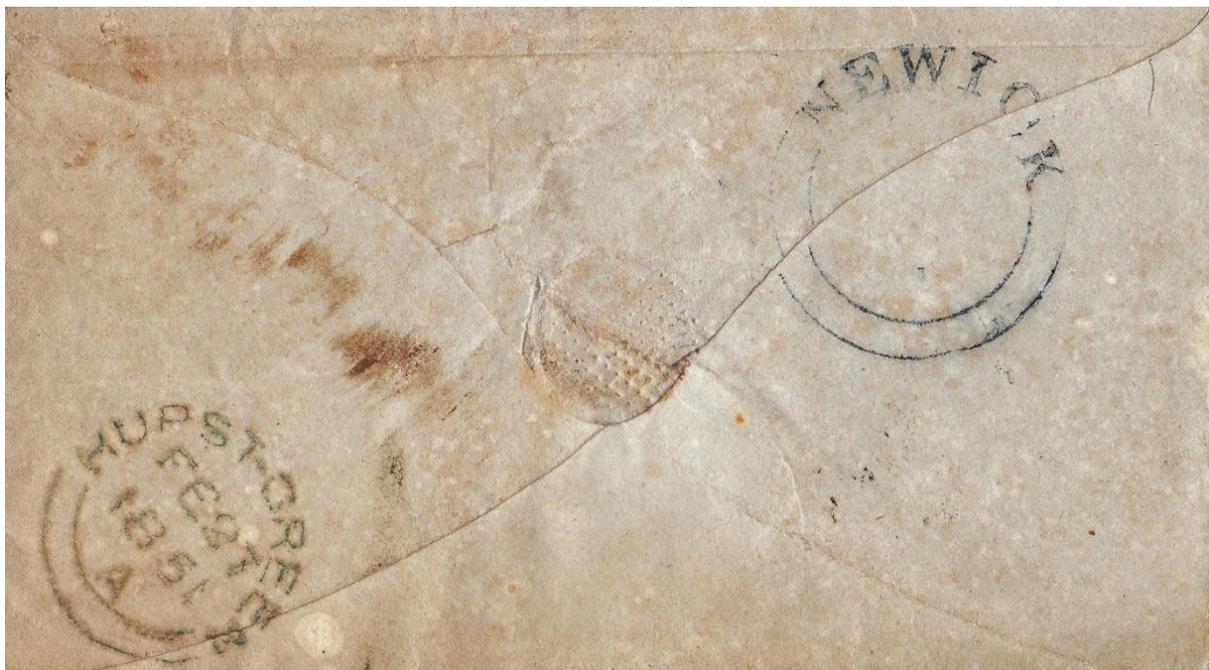
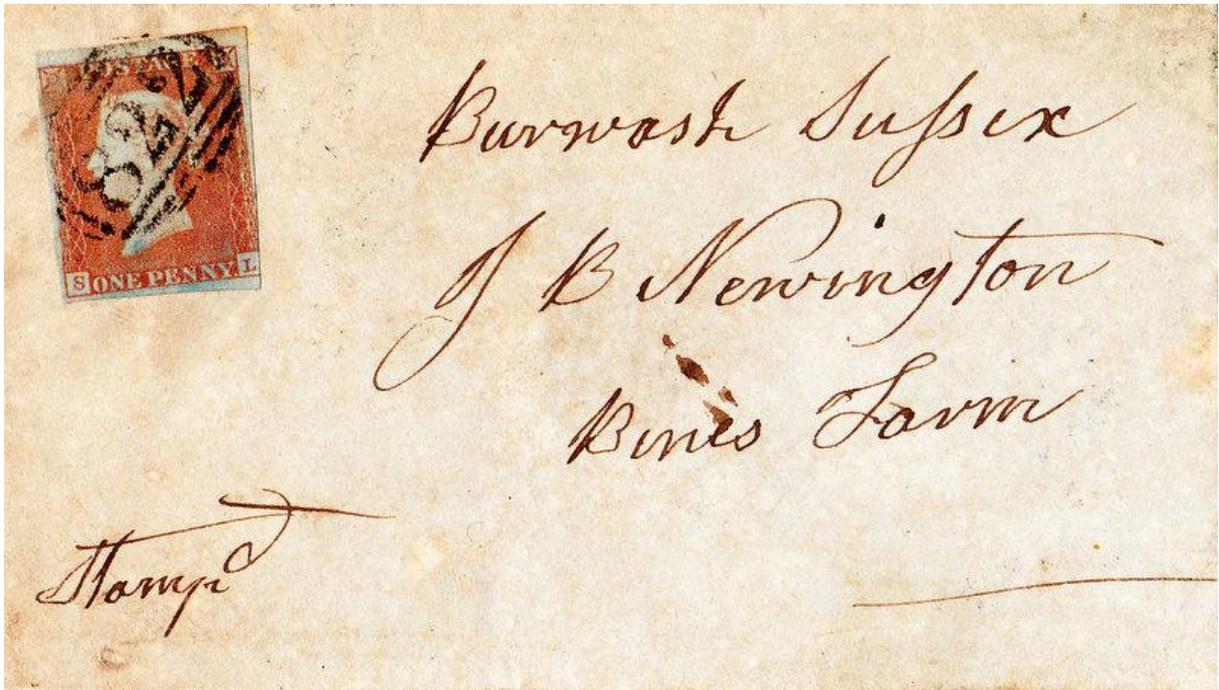
Rowland Hill and a 'penny black' stamp.

The Newick post office appears to have commenced in the early 1840s. The black-edged envelope below is from 1841, without a pre-paid adhesive stamp, but having 'Newick Penny Post' hand-stamped upon it. It is addressed to Miss M E Powell in Hackney. The Powell family in Newick were originally from Hackney.



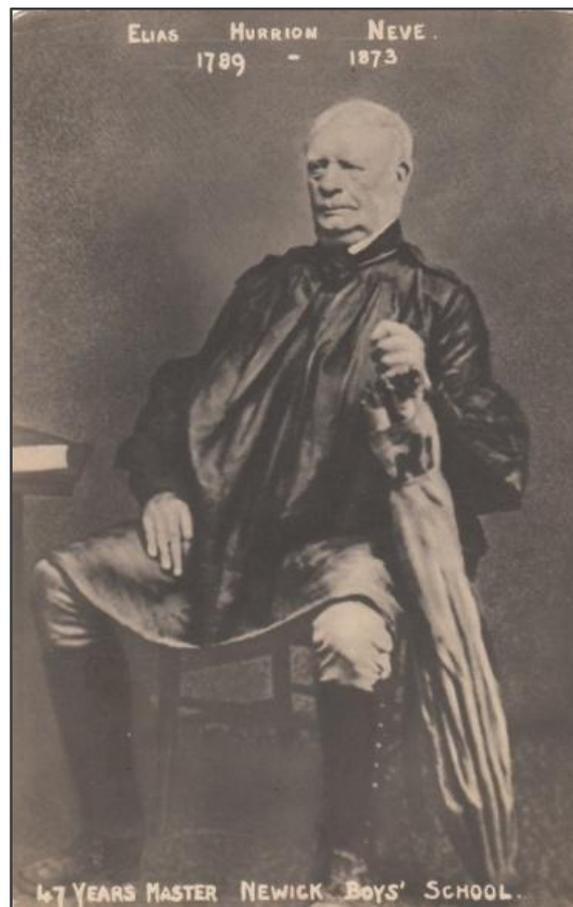
An 1841 envelope stamped 'Newick Penny Post'

An envelope still exists from James Taylor of Newick to Sir Thomas Phillips showing an 1849 Newick postmark. Below is an envelope posted to Burwash, Sussex in 1851. The postage stamp itself (a 'penny red') has the code number 822 stamped upon it showing that it has been through the Uckfield postal sorting office. The very clear 'Newick' postmark is shown on the reverse.



An envelope posted in 1851 in Newick

The 1855 *Post Office Directory for Sussex* shows the postmaster for Newick as being Elias Hurion Neve. He was also the village schoolmaster, a census enumerator, an assistant overseer collecting rates and, no doubt, able to read letters for those villagers unable to read. The first photograph below shows E H Neve. The second photograph shows, on the left, his single-storey school in Church Road (now demolished, along with the adjoining house).



Postmaster Elias Hurion Neve and the village school in which he taught

The 1850's and 1860's local newspaper advertisements for employment refer to responding through 'Newick Post Office'. The post office increased its services by also becoming a post office savings bank in 1863. The 1867 postal and commercial directory for Sussex shows the Newick post office as being for post, money orders and savings, with letters arriving at 8.00am from the nearest 'post town' of Uckfield, dispatched from Newick to Uckfield at 6.15pm, with money orders issued and paid from 9 till 5.

Below is a painting of a postman by artist William Hemsley (1819-1906).



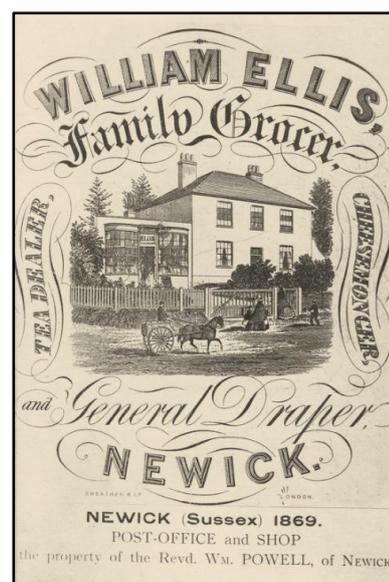
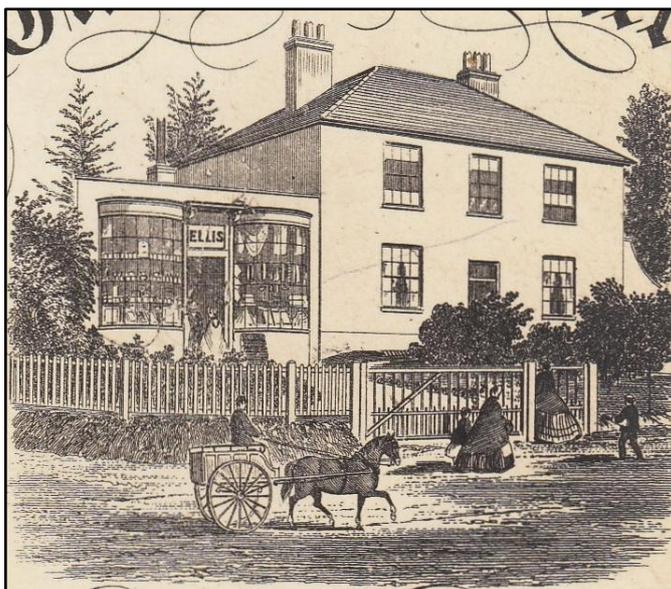
The Village Postman by William Hemsley (1819-1906)

*Memories of Old Newick* written by Ellen Fuller (1846-1933) refer to Newick post office and to the postmaster Elias Hurion Neve '...he possessed two dogs which went every day to Uckfield with a little cart on two wheels to bring the mail ...the postman walking along at the side'.

These times are also mentioned in the article *Reminiscences of Newick* by J W Isard (1859-1937) in the September 1930 *Sussex County Magazine* page 762 where he states... 'The post office, which was just an ordinary cottage, was kept by a Mr Neve, who was also the village schoolmaster and I believe in addition collected the district rates...' The particularly interesting point there is that the post office is described as 'just an ordinary cottage'. Further research could hopefully identify where that cottage was in Newick, but census and tithe map details certainly suggest that it was part of the old school building mentioned above in Church Road, where Elias H Neve was living.

By 1869 Elias H Neve, who was now 80 years old, was giving up some of his village jobs. He certainly had a very shaky signature by then.

So, in 1869 the post office was run by William Ellis in a shop. The first illustration below shows an engraving of the shop, attached to the side of Dove Cottage which stood on the northern corner of Church Road and Allington Road. The second illustration is a postcard photograph reproducing the engraving, with some explanation showing that William Ellis was a family grocer, tea dealer, cheesemonger and general draper, as well as having the village post office.



The shop with post office at Dove Cottage, Church Road in 1869

From 1870, letters were received via Lewes rather than via Uckfield, so envelopes were addressed as 'Newick, near Lewes', not 'near Uckfield.' The 1930 article by J W Isard mentioned earlier refers to this '...letters were conveyed from Newick to Lewes by a horse and cart and the man who collected the outgoing mail about 6 o'clock in the evening would spend the night in Lewes and return the following morning with the Newick letters'. It could be that the horse and cart shown in the engraving of the shop represents the post being brought to the premises.

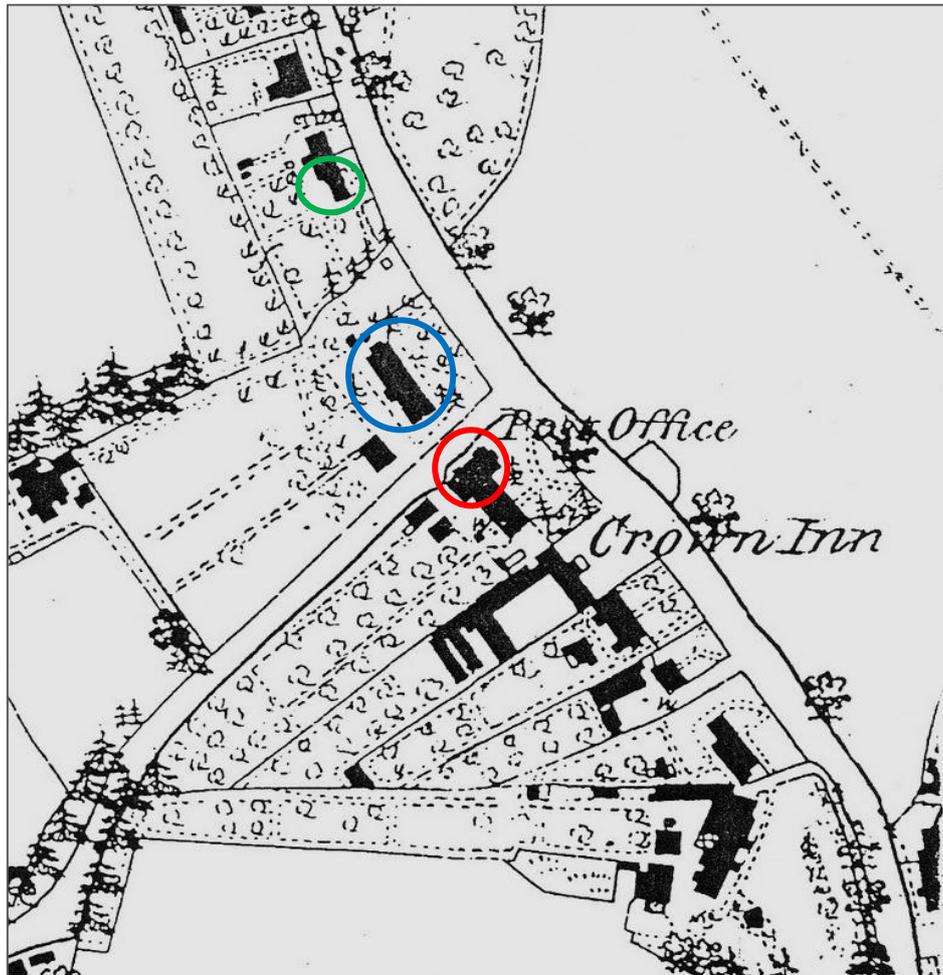
In 1871 the Newick post office was also in use as a telegraph office. J W Isard, referred to above, recalled this '...I well remember the telegraph poles being erected between Uckfield and Newick post office'.

The *Sussex Advertiser* newspaper explained that the use of the telegraph system had rapidly increased over the country, with the public beginning to comprehend and appreciate the enormous boon of the government taking the management of the system into their own hands. The newspaper article suggested that using telegraphy messages 'offers to inert and slow-minded persons an escape from letter writing...thousands of men who will infinitely prefer paying sixpence and penning ten words to writing a formal letter...it enables one to avoid many literary embarrassments on a small scale'.

Joyce Lindsey in her book *Newick- the Story of a Sussex Village* (1983) page 33/34, refers to William Ellis's shop/post office around this time. Reverend William Powell, who owned the 'flimsy, lean-to' shop, was persuaded by his tenant there (William Ellis) 'to build him across the road a premises of unprecedented scale'. This was to become the shop and post office in the current position on the southern corner of Church Road and Allington Road, leased to William Ellis. When Ellis left Newick, Frederick Bannister applied to take over the unexpired lease in 1873. He took on the task of running the shop and also the job of postmaster.

The 1874 commercial directory describes Frederick Bannister's use as grocer and draper and a 'post, money order, telegraph office and savings bank', with letters arriving from Lewes at 8.15am; dispatched at 5.35pm weekdays; on Sundays arrive at 8.15am; dispatched at 9.50am...money orders are issued and paid from 9 till 5'.

The 1875 Ordnance Survey map below shows, with a green circle, the location of the cottage in Church Road which had been used by Elias Hurion Neve as the village school and presumably for the first post office. The blue circle shows Dove Cottage where William Ellis then had his shop/post office. The red circle shows the new shop/post office building where Bannister's became established.



Ordnance Survey extract 1875

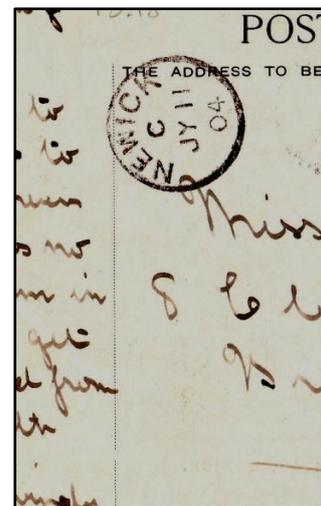
The premises is referred to in the mid 1880's in the book *East Grinstead and its Environs* published by Farncombe and Co, describing it as a block of modern buildings comprising 'the post office and a small edition of Whiteley's'. Whiteleys at that time was a well-known large departmental store in Westbourne Grove, London.

In the mid 1880's each person in the country was now writing, on the average, about 36 letters each year, which clearly was a huge change from the early years before 1840 of just three letters.

The 1890's period is mentioned in the article entitled *I Remember Newick - Village Cricket and other Memories of the Nineties* by C W Bennett in the *Sussex County Magazine* August 1944 page 213, where it states '...post office was at the grocers in Church Road.....the Royal Mail consisted of a pony trap which conveyed letters and parcels to Lewes and back...' The 1890s commercial directories refer to the premises being for groceries, drapery, furniture earthenware and ironmongery, as well as the post office. The post office was also referred to as being an Annuity and Insurance Office and in 1899 including a TMO? with Express Delivery and parcel post.

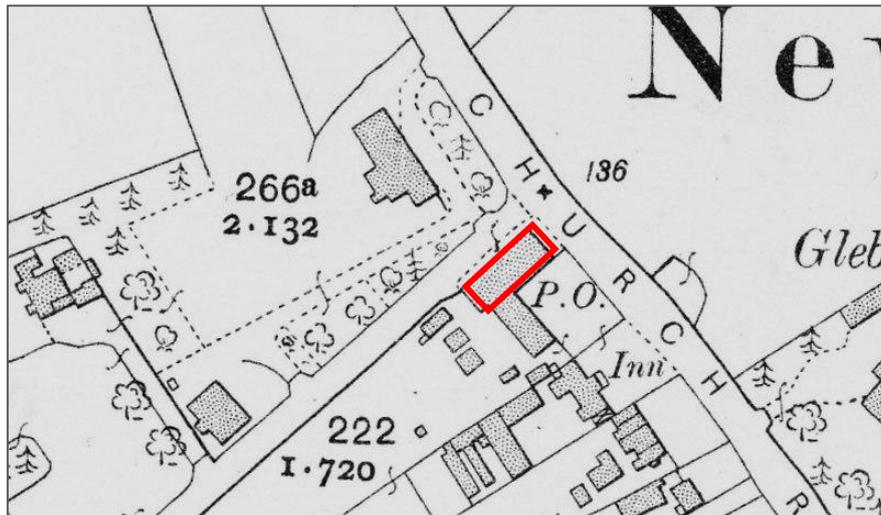
In October 1900 Bannister's stores, with the post office, suffered a disastrous fire. A servant girl sleeping in the dwelling-house adjoining the shop was awakened by fumes and smoke and gave the alarm at 3.00am. Neighbours helped with buckets of water, taking advantage of the small pond on the opposite side of the road. All the post office accounts and stock were retrieved along with an iron safe. Messengers were despatched on bicycles to alert the Uckfield fire brigade who arrived at 4.45 am. The property, owned by the Powell family, was insured but it left the Bannister family deprived of their home. The event was fully reported in the local newspaper

The premises were rebuilt in 1901, described in the newspaper as an improvement upon the destroyed building 'at any rate from a business point of view with separate branches of merchandise more easily kept distinct from one another and displayed in separate windows'. Below is a postcard photograph of the building, not long after the opening. The postmark is 1904.



The new building as shown on picture postcard postmarked 1904

Below is an extract from the 1910 Ordnance Survey map showing, in red, the extent of the new building. The shop, with its post office, remained in the Bannister family for many years.



The premises in 1910

In July 1921 the local newspaper announced that '...a public telephone call office has been opened at Newick post office. The call office is available during the ordinary hours of post office business...' The telephone number was appropriately 'Newick 1'. By 1928 the Newick telephone exchange, located in a building in Goldbridge Road with two operators, had 80 subscribers. The exchange lasted for 41 years until it was converted to automatic mechanism.



Bannister's shop with a telegraph/telephone post on the left

It was in the 1920s that picture postcard views of Newick started to show the new telephone poles. Complaints were made at the time from some residents who bumped into the poles, particularly at night.



Telephone poles now installed in the 1920s

One postman from the early 1900s was Martin Jenner, an old soldier who delivered his letters on a solid-tired tricycle. Another was Albert Markwick, said to be the first man to be called up from Newick to go to the First World War. He mended boots and shoes in his spare time. He wore a high-crowned cap with a peak rather like a French kepi, his legs enclosed in blue puttees.

Below is a newspaper cutting from May 1932 regarding the speed of the postal service, Sunday collections, etc.

<p>gn to olme, after- now  e was of the t. W. the lised. EL'S ch on d was very choir r my as a ganist very alf of esday</p>	<p>membership now stood at 98,000, representing all P.O. grades.</p> <p><b>IMPROVED POSTAL FACILITIES.</b>—The Lewes and District Postal facilities were further improved by the introduction of a new motor service at the beginning of the present month. A motor-cycle combination now serves Cooks-bridge, South Common, Plumpton Green, Chailey and Newick. Owing to the later afternoon dispatch for this area from the Lewes Head Office, which is timed at 3.15 p.m. instead of 1.30 p.m., letters posted in London up to 11.30 a.m. secure delivery the same afternoon. There are 15 motor-cyclist postmen operating from the Head Office, and in addition to the nine motor combinations a service van is employed to convey mails to and from Brighton, Uckfield, Ringmer, Newick and Chailey. The Sunday rural collections are also performed by motor-cyclists, and it is safe to say that the local postal facilities are now very expeditious, though every effort is still being made to effect further improvements.</p>	<p>Exam Eve has b suppo which sailor collec a Cor Bright wind men v recup men can r where lives' end Groce the l The they stan's of th</p>
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From East Sussex News newspaper 27<sup>th</sup> May 1932

Over the years, the Newick Parish Council had pressed the postmaster to make appropriate provision for post boxes in the more scattered parts of the parish. Below are photographs of three Newick post boxes. The first is a Victorian one which still remains at Fletching Common, with a Victoria Regina (VR) cypher at the top. The second is at Cornwells Bank with the George Rex (GR) cypher at the bottom. The third is a more modern one at Font Hill with the Elizabeth Regina (ER) cypher below the letter slot.



Post boxes with royal cyphers VR, GR and ER

A major wartime incident occurred at the Bannister's shop/post office in 1941. It was a hot day in May. Only two enemy planes had reached England on that day, one in Wiltshire and one here in Sussex. An enemy bomber came in over Shoreham at 4.45 in the afternoon, dropping bombs at Henfield, near Lindfield, then Chailey/Scaynes Hill and at 5 o'clock the bomber reached Newick. Laurie Wren on his market garden was bedding strawberries, heard the plane coming dropping bombs and laid on the ground with his fellow workers. Noel Fuller was in Newick Hill and dived into a ditch.

By Bannister's shop, people were hearing the plane and the whistle of a bomb coming down. They scrambled into the banks and ditches, including a lady who grabbed her baby from her pram. The bomb fell on the old Dove Cottage site opposite Bannister's with a massive explosion. Lime tree branches were flying through the air including over the empty pram. The walls and roof of Bannister's and the post office were damaged, with rubble and glass over the pavements.

Then there was silence. A Mr Carter had seen the bomb coming down 'like a huge beer bottle'. He had intended to dive underneath a lorry for protection but was pleased that he hadn't, because the lorry had rubble all around it, and under the lorry the concrete had lifted and jammed against the underside. The chemist's shop 'Oddie and Whitby,' by Terry's garage in Church Road, was damaged and inside on the floor surrounded by broken glass was the dead chemist 62 year-old Percy James Horsley. Broken glass had hit the back of his neck. People were injured by glass in Terry's garage and in Bannister's shop and the post office. Some of the injured went to Uckfield to have tetanus injections.

A couple of days later there was a photograph in the *Evening Argus* local newspaper, shown below with some added colour. The location of the scene was not disclosed in the accompanying caption because of wartime restrictions. At Kings hair-dresser's nearby (for haircuts and shaves) signs were erected saying 'Close Shave' and 'Blasted Well Carrying On'.

The chemist was buried in the Newick churchyard, with the gravestone inscription stating 'killed by enemy action'.



The aftermath of the 1941 bomb

In 1950 the Bannister family ceased running the post office after the very lengthy period of 77 years. It was handed over to Mrs E L Crowhurst. The Bannister family continued with the shop. This was explained in the *Sussex Express* newspaper of 7<sup>th</sup> July 1950 (extract below).

<p>” d he was sults e did uncil ge to were who down y of had ir of hing d to e the l the osidy, from nain- A not uncil ready y on s for erald Com- was e was as a not was g, as e to wish- l, he done lstry uncil They and uncil d to</p>	<h2 style="text-align: center;">NEWICK BREAK WITH POSTAL TRADITION</h2> <p><b>F</b>OR the first time since 1873 there will not be a Bannister in charge of Newick Sub-Post Office. Last of the line, 68 years - old Mr. George Bannister, of Fairview, Newick, retired from the office of sub-postmaster on Friday and his place is taken by Mrs. E. L. Crowhurst.</p>  <p>Mr. Bannister is not relinquishing the general stores and drapery business he has run in conjunction with the Newick post office. He became postmaster in 1918, taking over from his brother, Mr. Arthur Frederick Bannister, who had run the business for eight years. In his turn, Mr. Arthur Frederick Bannister took over the post office from his father, Mr. Frederick Bannister, who was postmaster from 1873 to 1910. The sub-post office has, therefore, been in charge of various members of the family for 77 years.</p> <p>Mrs. E. L. Crowhurst, who succeeded Mr. Bannister on Friday, was sub-postmistress at East Hoathly for the past five years.</p>	<p>At cred This had £48 felt pict It any year Al elect dec May and of v Mr hon. Cull hon. Th the cillo Slate Hodg Mess Sigg  T  At Mon and both char cont ing Lew day. ball of £</p>
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1950 newspaper extract

Below is a postcard photograph of Bannister's Stores in 1951 together with a 1958 bill showing that the Bannister's business was 'established 1873', the telephone number of the premises being 'Newick 1' and the 'proprietors' were Barclay Perkins and Co Ltd. The receipt sticker at the bottom of the bill is signed by Joyce Martin who was employed there for many years.



TELEPHONE 1 ESTABLISHED 1873

**POST OFFICE, NEWICK**  
SUSSEX

30<sup>th</sup> June 58

Mr G Kemp,  
Rock House

**BANNISTER'S STORES**  
(Proprietors: BARCLAY PERKINS & Co., LTD.)

GROCCERS, WINE, SPIRIT & BEER MERCHANTS  
128 DRAPERY AND HARDWARE 5-1

June 6	To Bill 70.	196
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06069 July 58  
Received from  
Mr G Kemp  
For BANNISTER'S STORES  
Signed J Martin

NEWICK, Sussex.  
The sum of  
£ s. d.  
196

Bannister's in 1951 and a typical headed bill from 1958

Below is a postcard photograph of the Bannister's premises, including the post office, in 1962.



Bannister's Stores and post office in 1962

In October 1988 vicious raiders at the post office stole £14,000. The 24-year old lady in charge of the post office was attacked as she was closing down for the day. She was handcuffed, her feet were bound with rope and she was punched in the face. The offenders even drove off in the lady's own car. She managed to work loose from the ropes after about 20 minutes and telephoned 999.

The 1990 advertisement below for Bannister's includes the post office use.

**BANNISTERS**

VIVIEN & CHRIS LOADER  
WELCOME YOU TO OUR  
**VILLAGE STORE**  
OFFERING FREE DELIVERIES  
CUSTOMER ACCOUNTS  
DELICATESSEN, GENERAL GROCERY  
& POST OFFICE

*COME IN AND MEET THE FRIENDLY  
STAFF IN THIS  
SPACIOUS & AIRY VILLAGE STORE*

**CHURCH ROAD, NEWICK. TEL: NEWICK 2681**

Local advertisement 1990

In 1992 the post office was now advertising as a separate business from the remainder of the building. The advertisement below is from the 1994 parish magazine showing that the post office was run by Terry and Annah Coombs, dealing not only with normal post office duties but also selling stationary, gifts, greetings cards, confectionary, ice cream, soft drinks and toys and being agents for dry cleaning and shoe repairs.

<p>Terry &amp; Annah Coombs</p> <h2 style="text-align: center;">Newick Post Office</h2> <p style="text-align: center;">Allington Road, Newick</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Stationary, gifts, greetings cards, confectionary ice cream, soft drinks, toys</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Telephone: Newick 722681</b></p>			<p>Agents for Dry Cleaning Shoe Repairs</p>
<p><b>Opening Times:</b></p> <p><b>Weekdays:</b> 9.00 - 1.00pm 2.15 - 5.30pm</p> <p><b>Wednesdays:</b> 9.00 - 1.00pm 2.15 - 4.00pm</p> <p><b>Saturdays:</b> 9.00 - 12.30pm</p>			

Extract from Parish Magazine 1994

Terry Coombs suffered a burglary at the premises, with the safe being stolen, later found in Fletching. On 2<sup>nd</sup> July 1996 the post office was subjected to a fierce day-time raid, as reported in the local newspaper shown below.

Elm Close, Laughton, had been con- unhappy despite winning his case. go in repaying unemployment bene- fit I have received.'

# Armed raiders in attack on village postmaster

**CUSTOMERS** stood in horror as three men armed with a sledgehammer and a baseball bat burst into Newick Post Office on Tuesday, attacking postmaster Terry Coombs and making off with cash.

The raid happened just before 4pm when the village post office was full of local people, including an elderly couple, and a mother and baby.

Mr Coombs was busy in the back of the shop when he heard the sound of smashing glass and a thug burst through the post office protective screen.

The man shouted at him to hand over cash and pinned him against a wall.

'I was more angry than anything else,' said Mr Coombs. 'They were smashing up my shop.'

'I tried but failed to reach my panic button then luckily I was able to kick the safe door shut with my foot, preventing them from getting at the real cash.'

'But I felt to be too bold would put my customers in danger.'

The robbers, cheated of a major haul, struck Mr Coomb in the arm and made off.

He suffered a bruise and a cut but was otherwise unhurt.

'I didn't feel vulnerable until now in a small village post office,' he added. 'I didn't think I was a target, although I have been burgled before.'

The three men made off with hundreds rather than thousands of pounds in a red Vauxhall Astra which had been stolen in Lewes the previous day.

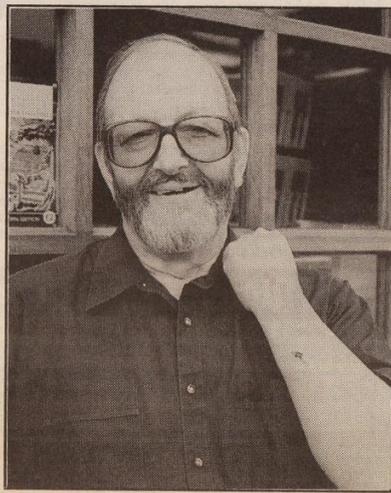
It was later found abandoned in a field near Barcombe.

There is no clear description of the men as they wore scarves and baseball caps but they appear to have been comparatively young, with southern accents and probably know the area well as they used country roads to make their getaway.

Police used a helicopter to try and catch the men, without success.

**Report by JOHN ECCLES**



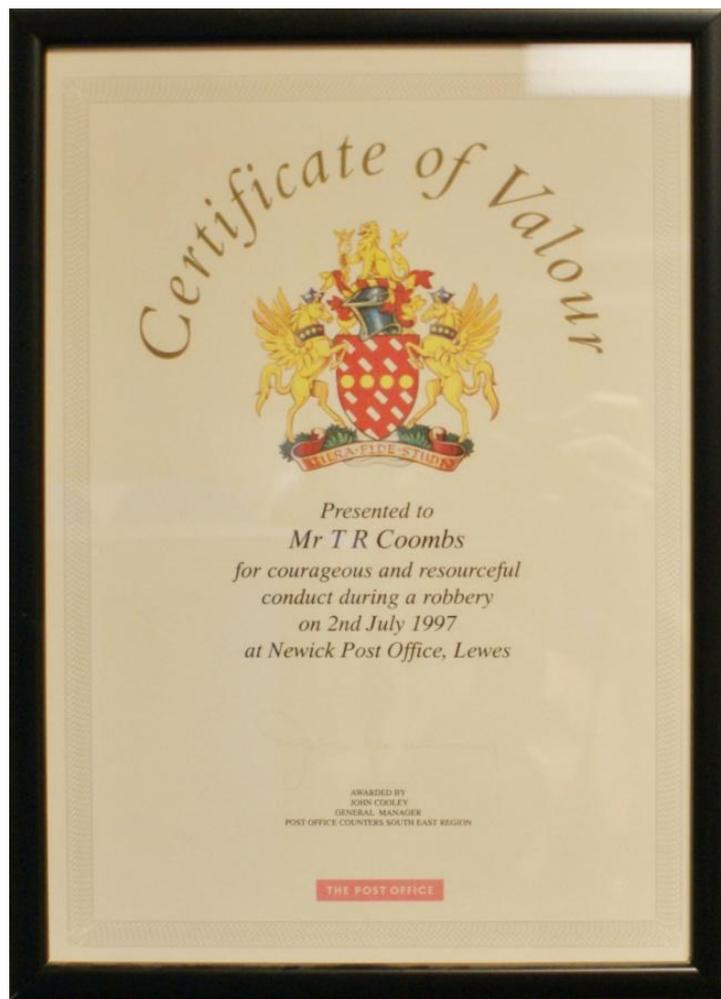


● Mr Coombs shows his scarred arm.

The raid, reported in the *Sussex Express* 5<sup>th</sup> July 1996

The raiders took cash. Terry had tried but failed to reach the panic button. He was luckily able to kick the safe door shut with his foot, preventing the raiders getting the more substantial amounts of cash there, but he felt that to have been too bold would have put his customers in danger. An *Evening Argus* article on the raid stated that Terry had been the sub-postmaster in Newick for more than four years and was previously press officer for the Hong Kong police. Terry stated that he had "been home in England for five years and in that time I have had my house burgled, my shop has been burgled and now it has been robbed".

Terry suffered with bruises and a cut to his arm. He deservedly received a certificate of valour from 'Post Office Counters South-East Region', oddly stating the date as 1997 rather than the correct date of 1996. The security screen for the counter was later improved and a closed circuit television camera installed in 1997.



Certificate 'for courageous and resourceful conduct during a robbery'

Over the years, Newick post office in Allington Road had to adapt to many revised requirements and the threat of closure. Tony Mayes in his 2002 book *Newick Retold* (page 152) stated that 'like many village post offices it provides a great service to the community with postal and financial services. It is also a place where one often meets friends to catch up with local news'.

Below are photographs of the post office in 2016, including Terry Coombs and his customers with displays ready for Christmas.



The post office in November 2016

Sadly, in May 2017, Terry Coombs died and the Post Office immediately closed. The local member of parliament Maria Caulfield recognised that the closure caused great concern to many in the village and stated in a letter to residents *'the Post Office are investigating the options that are available to reinstate a Post Office service to the Newick community and are actively looking for partners who may be interested in running Newick Post Office. It may be the case that the Post Office will want to operate a Post Office local service, in conjunction with a local shop within the community'*.

Finding an alternative premises/operator for a post office proved difficult. In February 2019 the redundant post office premises was opened as a dog grooming shop.

Then, finally, on 10<sup>th</sup> September 2019, a new post office opened, incorporated into the 'Newick News and General Store' in Newick Drive.



Newick News and General Store in September 2019 with the Post Office sign

The photographs below show the small post office counter fitting neatly into the Newick shop, together with the local Royal Mail postal van and postman.



Newick Post Office and Royal Mail - September 2019

## INFORMATION SOURCES

Newick tithe map 1840 and associated schedule (apportionments) at East Sussex Record Office, The Keep, Brighton - reference: TD/E 42/1

National Population Census...Newick... 1841 etc

E-Bay web site displaying an envelope with an 1849 Newick postmark

Thomas Baden Powell documents regarding land ownership in 1868 and 1901 at East Sussex Record Office, reference: ACC 8916/1/6

'Chailey Union' correspondence from 1868/69 at the National Archives, Kew - reference: MH 12 12807

Article entitled 'The Post Office' in *The English Illustrated Magazine* 1884 page 291

*East Grinstead and its Environs* published by Farncombe and Co, 1880's

Commercial directories....*Pigot and Co, Kelly's, Post Office, etc*

Ordnance Survey maps

Contemporary newspapers - *Sussex Advertiser, East Sussex News, Sussex Agricultural Express, Sussex Express, Evening Argus* etc

*Memories of Old Newick* by 'a Sussex Woman' (1846-1933)

Article entitled 'Reminiscences of Newick' by J W Isard in *Sussex County Magazine* September 1930, page 762

Newick Parish Magazines, various dates

Information on the wartime incident is from *The War in East Sussex* by the *Sussex Express* 1945, and from multiple sources at the National Archives, Kew

'I Remember Newick - Village Cricket and other Memories of the Nineties' by C W Bennett in the *Sussex County Magazine* August 1944 page 213

Memories of Arthur E Oldaker at East Sussex Record Office (The Keep) reference: AMS 5785/4, refer to postman Martin Jenner

*Newick- the Story of a Sussex Village* by Joyce Lindsey (1983) pages 33/34

*Newick Retold* by Tony Mayes 2002

Old envelopes, picture postcards, Bannister's 1958 bill and modern photographs from private collection

Information from Newick postmaster Terry Coombs

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