

The Postmistress Looks Back Over 43 Years

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"VILLAGE to have its Post Office again."

That was a headline last week, but it set me thinking and no doubt other people have been thinking too. What happened to the old one?

It is still there in the little village of Sopley and the rambler rose is growing thicker over the ornate porch way. But it doesn't really matter now even if the rose completely hides the bright red letter box in the wall behind, because there are no more customers.

It is six months or more since 76-year-old Mrs. M. J. Harrison banged the last official date stamp on the ink pad. For 43 years she had been the village postmistress and it was only her health that made her give up last June.

"The post office has been my whole life," she told me, adding that she was indeed sorry when she found she would have to retire.

Kept Pace With It.

There have been many changes in postal methods and big increase in the volume of work since Mrs. Harrison took over in 1904, but in spite of her advancing years she managed to keep pace with it. "Things were pretty tough during this last war when we had so many servicemen stationed

round her," she said. "There were so many parcels and telegrams to deal with, and what with the various war weapons weeks you can guess I had plenty to do."

I asked her about the old days. "We were a sorting office then, and we had two postmen—one from Ripley and the other from Hurn—who came, at 7 o'clock in the morning to sort out the letters," she said. As regards telegrams, she remarked: "I had not regular messengers, but I was very fortunate in getting people from the village to deliver the telegrams for me."

A Family As Well.

Mrs. Harrison has had to find time for household duties in addition to her post office work. Her husband died just before she took over the post office and she had three sons and a daughter to look after. She now has six grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

Everyone in Sopley and the adjoining villages knows Mrs. Harrison and when the villagers heard she was retiring they clubbed together to buy her a modern bed-settee. She proudly showed me the framed list of signatures of her well-wishers, and from a small dispatch box on the sideboard she produced a letter from the Head Postmaster expressing sincere appreciation of her work for the post office.

One of Mrs. Harrison's sons who is following in his mother's footsteps in the post office, is popularly known as "Taffy," the whistling postman.