

## Rural Lincolnshire - a case study of post offices

(conducted by the Post Office)

The only way really to appreciate the important role that post offices play in rural Britain is to look at some examples. The PIU team visited rural post offices in Lincolnshire, Gloucestershire, the Borders region of Scotland, South Wales and County Armagh in Northern Ireland.

### Case Study

There are over 300 post offices in Lincolnshire, of which over 250 are in rural areas

The PIU team visited villages along the road from the small market town of Saxilby to the village of Corringham.

- The small market town of **Saxilby** is about 5 miles north-west of Lincoln. It has a population of 3,000. There is a large Co-op supermarket in the town and a number of other smaller shops. The last bank branch closed six years ago, but a mobile bank visits three times a week for one and a half hours. The post office in the town is the busiest office in the locality - with more than 500 pensioners claiming benefits here. It has 4 counter positions, and is co-located with a stationery shop which also sells cards and toys. There is a separate till behind the post office counter for this secondary business. The sub-postmaster recently refurbished the post office at a cost of £11,000. Most of the post office's customers live in the town. But a significant proportion of customers travel from nearby villages - either because their own village does not have a post office, or because they happen to be in the town for other reasons. Attached to the post office is a Royal Mail sorting office which is also managed by the subpostmaster - and provides an additional source of income.
- Following the road north from Saxilby, the next settlement is **Sturton-by Stow** - a medium-sized village about 11.5 miles away. The post office is within a large well-stocked general store - which is the only place to buy groceries in the village. It has two counters and is used by almost 200 pensioners to collect benefits. There is another small general store in the village.
- **Stow** is a small village less than one mile further north. It has a pub and a church but no shops. The post office serves around 75 pensioners, and does not stock any groceries. It is run by an elderly sub-postmistress.
- **Normanby by Stow** is the next settlement on the road - about a mile north of Stow. It has a population of about 20 people, and does not have a post office or any other shops.
- The next village on the road is **Willingham** which has almost 500 residents. The post office here closed 3 years ago after the sub-postmaster resigned due to age and did not offer his premises for continued use. The Post Office approached others in the village, and found one potential applicant. But there were problems obtaining permission for the change of use of the new premises, so the application fell through.
- The small village of **Kexby** (located about a mile further north) has around 70 residents and does not have a post office.
- The next village is **Upton** (less than a mile north of Kexby) which has around 400 residents. It has a post office serving over a hundred pensioners, run by a couple, and combined with a general store. There are no other grocery shops in the village, but many of the village's residents opt to do most of their grocery shopping at a supermarket in Gainsborough (about six miles away).
- Going north from Upton, the next two villages are **Heapham** and **Springthorpe** - both with about 100 residents and without a post office.

- Just past the junction with the main road to Gainsborough is the village of **Corringham** - where the post office is co-located with the village shop. There is also a petrol station in this village, which sells general groceries.

Including Saxilby, there are 10 settlements along this seven mile stretch of road - and five post offices serving the area. Looking at these offices confirms the ubiquity of the Post Office network in rural areas:-

- Two of the five post offices co-exist with the last grocery shop. And one other helps keep open a general store in a village with only one other shop. One post office sells stationery rather than groceries and another is a stand-alone post office.
- Only the post offices at Saxilby and Sturton-by-Stow are busy - the others each do relatively few transactions.
- Villages without a post office tend to be hamlets - four of the five villages without a post office have less than 100 residents.
- Willingham is the only village with a significant population without a post office - almost 500 people. But here the post office closed when it proved impossible to find a replacement sub-postmaster.
- The five post offices and the mobile bank which visits Saxilby three times a week are the only places to take out cash along this route.

This small stretch of road represents only a tiny part of rural Britain, and the five post offices only a tiny part of the rural post office network. But this part of Lincolnshire is typical of most parts of rural Britain. What is most striking is the way that post offices remain in villages which have very few other services, giving post offices a special place in the hearts of villagers.

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