

1 Brook Street

The Latest Makeover Peter Clarke *writes...* Benson Bulletin July/August 08

Being a rather old-fashioned kind of bloke, I *think* I've got the expression right if call No.1 Brook Street's latest refurbishment a "makeover".

If so, then it's the latest and very creditable stage in the life of one of Benson's oldest buildings. The house, sometimes also named "Crossways" after its position in the village, has medieval parts in its construction. In 1979, John Blair, writing in *Oxiensia* describes details of the cruck construction, clearly visible from the outside of the building at its north-east end. For a more comprehensive history, go to Catherine Murray's description on page 171 of "*Benson – A Village Through its History*" available as ever in Derry's Den. She describes the major rebuild by Richard Arthur in 1747 when the entire house frontage was re-built, evidenced by his marks left in the brick work.



Vernon's final job was to replace one of the former builder's earlier plaques.

Janet tells me the first record she has is of occupation by the Munday family. They were saddlers who also owned the Post Office close by.

Then Crossways became one of the village's first garages, apparently originally owned by a Mr Halliday. It was in about 1947 when Peter Aldridge became the owner.



This is the one picture we have of that garage, looking a little worse for wear, taken perhaps just before it finally closed. Note however the easily visible cruck beams appearing from behind the cracking plaster.

Quite when the garage actually closed someone can surely tell us, but the adjacent workshops are of course still in full working order. Mrs Aldridge lived in the house until her death last year. The bases of the petrol pumps remained, until finally removed by Mr Miners.

1 Brook Street in the 20th Century Janet Burt writes ...

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In the 1915 Kelly's Directory Edgar J Munday is listed as sub-postmaster and saddler, and he was married to Fanny Price (Barbara Perry's aunt). Fanny and Edgar lived at the Post Office and he used 1 Brook St for his saddlery business. The Shotton family took over the Post Office in 1937 and Mr Halliday had taken over 1. Brook St. as a garage and was well established by 1939 when the first entries in his accounts books appear. (see BB for July/August page 12). Peter Aldridge took over the garage in about 1947 and his widow, Dorothy, lived at 1 Brook Street until her recent death. I have chosen to concentrate on the study of the accounts for 1939, as it was such a momentous year in our history. The total number of clients for that year plus the following decade was 106 regulars, and then casual fuel-only customers.

Benson client names for that year which may evoke memories for older villagers were:- W., W.J., H., and G. Aldridge; Dr. Birch; Mr and Mrs Burkitt; R.A.G. Bennett (Schoolmaster) W. Bennett (The Dairy); Major Cole (The Limes); Wing Commander Combe (Brookside); Dr Harris; Colonel Hardcastle; Arthur Jenkins (Peter Clarke's grandfather); R. Manley (Preston Crowmarsh); F. N. Paxman (The Hale); Miss D Pryce – later Mrs Machin- daughter of Revd Pryce, of Mulberry Cottage); Mrs Stubbs (Paddock House); G.W.Treadwell (Brook Lodge); and Wainwrights (Fyfield Manor) Other clients came from Ewelme, Shillingford, Ipsden, Winterbrook, Rush Court, Wallingford, Turners Court, North Stoke, Warborough, Dorchester and Huntercombe. It is interesting to note that retiring military men are not a new phenomenon in the village.

Fuel costs in 1939 were as follows:-Shell petrol, 1s 7d a gallon, Pool petrol, 1s 8d a gallon; oils – BB 8d per ½ pint, XL 7d per ½ pint; grease 10d per pound, and brake fluid 1s. [For comparison:- 1s = 5p, 6d = 2 ½ p, 10s = 50p, and £1 = £1]

In 1939 the word "service" didn't seem to be in use but "general attention to car" was, and maintenance jobs were recorded and carried out piecemeal.

January 1939 seems to have been a very cold month as several cars had to be unfrozen, and there were a great many punctures to be repaired that year. I thought that this was because of the rough state of the roads, but an elderly gentleman who drove at that time tells me that many people drove their tyres until they were down to the canvas linings before changing them! A tube repair then cost

1s 6d, a new tube 10s 6d, a Goodyear Pathfinder cover (tyre) £1. 5s, and a larger Dunlop cover was £2. 16s .

Mr Halliwell was called upon to do all sorts of other jobs. In 1939 these were:- blackout car headlamps; take pigeons to Goring Station; repair cycles, and domestic electrical appliances; sharpen shears and lawn mowers; repair a speaking tube (presumably Mrs Burkitt had a chauffeur!) and even repair a milk churn. He also serviced boats, motor launches mainly, and was asked to lift, repair, paint and store them, and then relaunch and test them. Mr Halliwell had to be quite inventive as he made parts, drilled tubes, made and fitted locking devices for two cars, made oil pipes, as well as panel beating and painting. For the local honey business he was asked to construct a honey press, and take a honey knife to pieces, clean out rust, polish and rebuild it.

The models of cars sounded very different then though some of the makes are still in production. They were :- Austin 12/4, Austin 10, Morris 12/4, Wolseley, Lanchester, Flying Standard 12 hp, Hotchkiss 21hp, Armstrong Siddeley 30 hp, Rover 19hp "Speed Pilot" , Vauxhall A S.X.S.B ,Hillman 10hp, and Swift 10hp. The garage also did repairs to farm vehicles – Fordson and "Moscow" tractors, trailers and carts.

This is but a brief glimpse into the life of a prewar garage, but we hope to make the ledgers finally accessible to view once our Benson Archive and Research Centre is up and running. Please let us know any more details if you know them as we are always happy to add to our store of Benson history.