

THE TELEPHONE IN POTTERS BAR

By Brian Warren (PBDHS Journal No. 9)

Introduction

It was some years ago when I thought it would be interesting to re-construct a telephone directory of the first hundred subscribers. The thought remained with me until 1993, when Graham Wooten, from the BT Museum, came to examine the telephones in the Wyllyotts Centre Museum. In November, I visited the BT Archives and Historical Centre, Temple Avenue, London, and examined the directories for 1906 – 1907, 1912 and 1920.

The Early Days

The first telephone exchange in Potters Bar, included Northaw, and it was opened by the National Telephone company (NTC) in a private house, 'Shaldon', 68 Hatfield Road. The exact opening date is unclear, but was recorded as being open in the 8th January, 1907 issue of the Post Office Circular. Yet Thomas Burnet was the lessor from the Company, according to a lease dated 13th August, 1908, providing him with a five-year lease from the 29th September, 1908 and renewable annually after that date. The rent was £28 per annum.

Lilian Cooper was the first telephone operator of the small manual exchange, of the Central Battery Signalling type. The Post Office took over from the NTC from the 1st January, 1912. The exchange at 68 Hatfield Rose no longer existed after the 28th August, 1930 and subscribers were transferred to another manual exchange, of the Central Battery (CB) IO type, at the corner of Quakers Lane and Hatfield Road.

1906 – 1907 Southern Section of the Telephone Directory

No	Subscriber	Address
1	National Telephone Co. Ltd	
2	Reverend FJ Hall	Northaw Place
3	JMB Kidston	Nyn, Northaw
4	WM Porter	Fairlawn, Northaw
5	EC Wheater	Moffats
52	CH Belsey, J.P.	Little Heath Lodge
53	Dr A Waddell	The Hermitage
54	WA Burge, Stockbroker	Salisbury House
55	Mrs Dore	Stormont
56	Howlett, Jobmaster	Railway Hotel
57	CB Harness	Claregate
58	HW Winchester, Fishmonger	High Road
59	Dr HF Vaughan-Jackson	Carramore Cottage

From the twelve subscribers one can discern the pattern which is to be noted in the later directories. The wealthy inhabitants first became the possessors of a telephone, then the doctors, so as to be able to attend to their paying clients. The tradespeople soon acquired a telephone, so as not to lose trade. In this category in 1906 – 1907 came the fishmonger and the Jobmaster at the Railway hotel. The vast majority of people at that time could not afford a telephone when the rental amounted to a servant's wage.

Though I have not completed my initial idea of one hundred subscribers, the following is a compilation of the 1912 London and Provincial area directory (27 subscribers), and 1920 Hertford area directory (78 subscribers). Those marked with an 'x' appear in 1912. Note only 18 of the 27 subscribers were still the same in 1920.

No	Subscriber	Address
1	The Post Office	
2	Reverend PC Underhill / CE Winter	Northaw Place
3x	JMB Kidston	Nyn, Northaw
4x	WM Porter	Fairlawn, Northaw
5x	A Henderson	Moffats
6x	G Roddick	The Hook
7	Sir PH McClelland KBE	Springfield
8	F Chase	West View, Coopers Lane
9x	AC Clauson	Hawkshead House, Hatfield
10x	J Forbes	Mount Grace
11x	F Partridge	Salisbury House
12	Reginald Hollington	Chequers Mead
13	AH Seabrook, Engineer	Westwood
14		
15	Mrs J Paterson	Vernon House, Northaw
16	J Burn, Actuary	Rydal Mount
17	RG Heaton	Northaw House
18	WJ Pritchard, Physn/Surgn.	The Hermitage
19	FW Bovill	Bridgefoot, South Mimms
20	GA Brown, Coachbuilder	Coopers Lane
21x	DM Linley, Insurance Manager	Heathfield, Little Heath
22x	Cottage Hospital	Potters Bar
23	WA Richards & Co. Ltd.	Station Road
24x	B Laing	Abdale House
25	Barclays Bank	High Road
26	A Bishop	Kerdistone, Little Heath
27x	Miss Poland	St. Just, Northaw
28	Mrs A Thompson	Mimwood, Hatfield
29	Mrs Wm. Forbes	Oakmere
30x	HT Seymour	Pottrells, Hatfield
31x	WM Jackson	Leggatts
32	Automobile Association & Motor Union	Patrol's Sentry Box

33	International Tea Co's Stores Ltd. Grocery & Provisions	High Street
34	MW Bird, Dairy Farmer	Oakmere Farm
35	A Hollington	The Ridgeway
36	G Evans	Dancers Hill, Barnet
37	JJE Wallis	Glenwood, Little Heath
38	Campbell & Walker Motor Garage	Regent Garage (later Twyman's)
39	Sir EM Pollock K.C. KBE, M.P.	Northaw
40	FL Cranmore Garage & Motor Engineer	High Road
41	JH Wynter	Brenton, Little Heath
42	HL Gausson	Brookmans Park, Hatfield
43	M Ashfordbury-Trenchard	The Great Wood, Northaw
44	H Russell Smith	Heath Side, Little Heath
45	H Shillitoe	Mount Grace Road
46	JD Bright	The Grange, Northaw
47	H Santer	Potters Bar
48	Chaffey Giddins J.P.	Windmore Hall, South Mimms
49	Revered AH Webb	The Vicarage
50		
51	E Allen	Mount View, Heath Road
52x	CH Belsey, J.P.	Little Heath Lodge
53	AB Sanderson	Morven
54	J Hart	Lochinver, Little Heath
55x	Mrs K Dore	Stormont
56	Campbell & Walker Motor Garage	Station Garage
57	M Tom	Claregate
58	Metropolitan Police	Potters Bar Police Station
59x	Dr HF Vaughan-Jackson	Carramore Cottage
60	E Wormald	Sleep Hill
61x	GM McDowell Nathan	Little Heath Wood
62	HG Hancock	Two Brewers, Northaw
63	H Ayscough Thompson	Rosemead, Little Heath
64	F Winter	Parly Avenue
65	F Guppy	Grasmere, Dugdale Hill
66	Mrs F Oldfield	Elm Court
67	Metropolitan Police	South Mimms Police Station
68	G Simcox, Surveyor & Inspector	Bearwood, The Causeway
69	BH Walker	Kingscote
70	CE Winter	Northacre, Northaw
71	Reverend J Seymour Hill	The Vicarage, Little Heath
72		
73		
74	Major W McCure DSO	Homeleigh, The Avenue
75	GJ Wallis	Stanwick, Little Heath
76	AH Oxenford	Dalvey
77	AC Gamby, Cars for Hire	17, Whaley Road
78	H May, Cartage & Contractors	Mutton Lane
79	Mrs EWM Popple	The Hollies
80		

81	Burgoyne & Son Motors, General Engineers	High Street
82	N Gratten Doyle M.P. D.L., J.P.	Osborne House
83	HD Gosschalk	The White Cottage
84	AP Blaxter, M.I.M.E.	Chidham, Heath Road

By 1920 the influence of the motor car can be seen, again the affluent inhabitants would purchase first and to maintain easy contact with their clients the garage proprietors acquired a telephone. Over half the inhabitants with a telephone would now be outside of the immediate area of the present Potters Bar. In fourteen instances the telephone numbers were transferred from one property to another. E.g. No. 54 in 1912 was for Salisbury House, but in 1920 it was assigned to Lochinver.

South Mimms had a type of service normally used only for small villages; it was the only community in the London area to do so. It had a "satellite" exchange, totally dependent on its connection to Potters Bar. Every call, unless to another South Mimms subscriber, had to go by way of Potters Bar. Ted Salter in "Fifty Years in Ridge" (See 'The Journal No. 3') noted that the parishioners of Ridge were dependent on George Hollis and his family for many years as their link to the outside world. They operated the South Mimms Telephone Exchange from their shop-parlour, opposite the village green, in the centre of South Mimms. Father and family took turns to man the switchboard providing a year round 24 hour service with a polite 'Number please?'. At that time there were 23 lines, ten in January 1938 the exchange became automatic. Thirty years later when there were 305 lines the exchange became part of that in Potters Bar.

In the meantime the Potters Bar exchange had 444 lines in 1931, 2,146 lines in 1947 when the Potters Bar area became an automatic exchange. In 1968 there were 7,996 lines. On the 24th September, 1982, the Strowger exchange was replaced by a new electronic exchange. Today there are no operators but the operator service is provided by some other exchange, which could be miles away.

ADDITIONAL TECHNICAL INFORMATION by Arnold Lynch

The explanation of 'CBS' and 'CB' is: early telephones needed a battery (which a century ago was a wet one, not the modern dry cell) to convey the speech, and a magneto, turned by a winding handle, to ring an electric bell at the far end, which might be a telephone exchange worked as a sideline by a person whose main job was something else. After full-time operators were introduced, they were alerted by lamps rather than bells when subscribers wanted to make calls; the current for the lamps could be supplied by a battery at the exchange. This was Central Battery Signalling or CBS.

A later improvement was to abolish the individual batteries at each telephone and draw all currents from a large battery at the exchange; this was Central Battery or CB system, the last system used before the introduction of automatic exchanges and dialling by the subscribers.

B. Warren November 1995.