

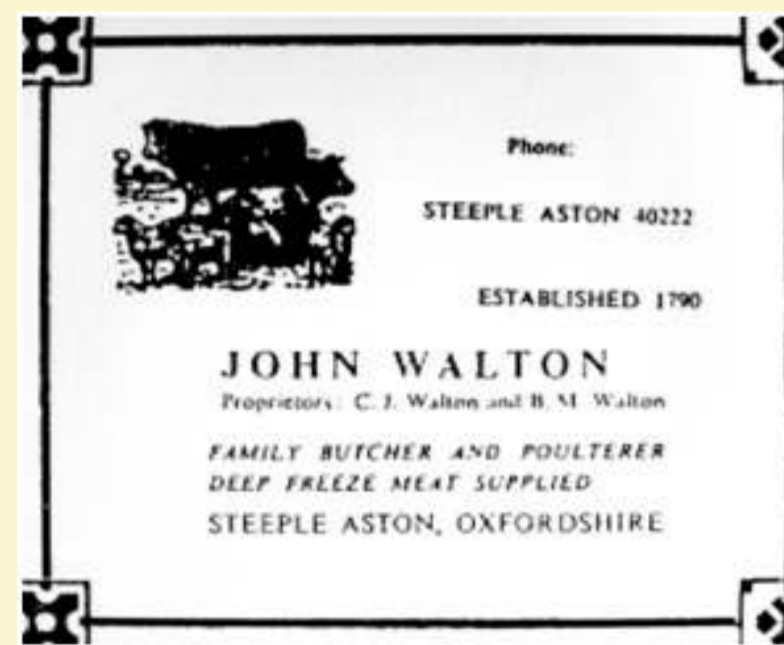
VILLAGE SHOPS

The Waltons of Bladebone Hall



Aerial view of Bladebone Hall, with the shop and outbuildings beyond - now the site of Walton House.

From July 1983 until the firm shut up shop in 1995, no issue of SAL was complete without a small advertisement from John Walton's the butchers, with its proud boast "established 1790". The same line appeared in their shop front when the interior was reorganised in 1984 to make space for frozen foods and greengroceries to meet the growing competition from supermarkets:



An early "small-ad" and John Walton outside the shop with assistant Glyn Brooks.



In June 1990 an editorial congratulated John and Betty Walton on "continuing the butchery business in Steeple Aston to reach 200 years of service to the community". SAVA has no reason to doubt the claim, though we would be interested to know how this date arose - unfortunately the early paperwork does not seem to have survived.

By 1990 The Walton family themselves had by then clocked up an impressive 108 years, the first John Walton having taken over an already long-standing business in 1882. It had already passed through three generations of the Wall family - the last of them, William Wall III, having died just three years earlier in 1879.

John Walton was succeeded in the business by his fourth son, Frank "Charlie" Walton, who passed it on to three of his own sons, John, Richard and Stuart. The last two eventually moved on to open butchers' shops elsewhere, but John and Betty kept the business going until 1996, a remarkable record for a village enterprise.



Walton's advertised regularly in SAL. Here is December 1993.

All good things have to come to an end, and in June 1995 John and Betty announced their retirement. Their assistant Glyn took the opportunity to declare the opening of his own business in Kidlington. Sadly John's hopes for a lengthy retirement were not fulfilled and in February 1998, SAL published a tribute to John both for his contribution to village life and his love of country pursuits.

The shop around 1992



Continuity and change at the Village Shop

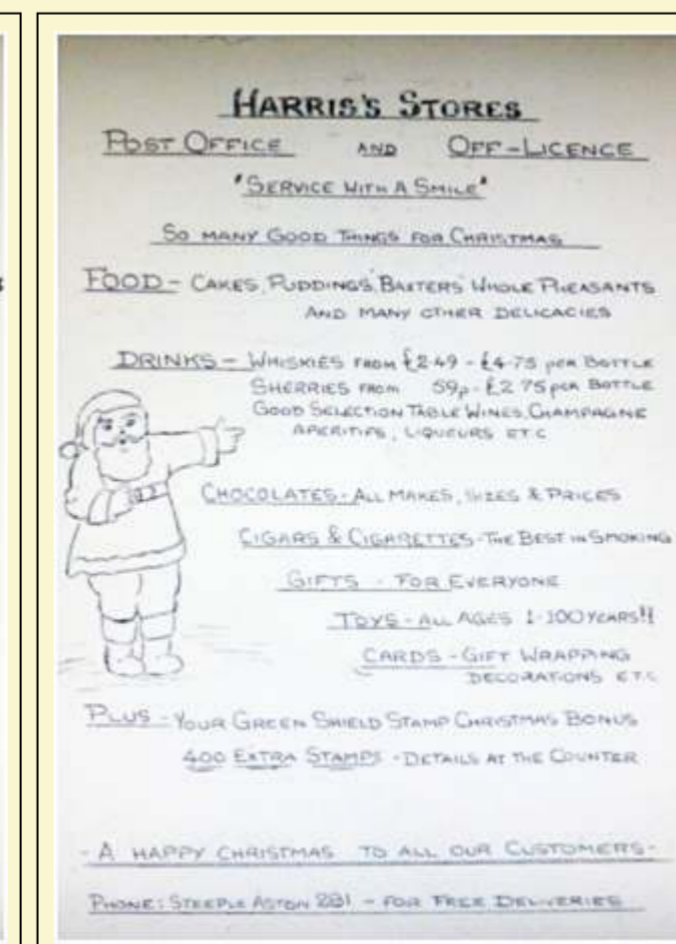
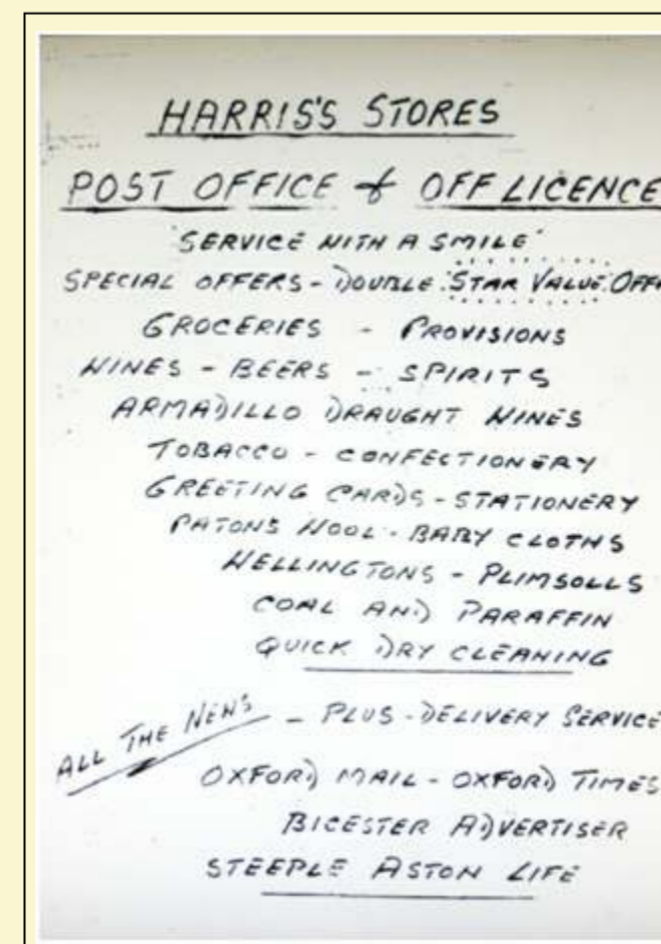
Another enterprise which can justifiably pride itself on its long service to the community is the Village Shop, alias Harris's Stores, on or near the corner of South Side and Paines Hill. In fact the Walkers' advertisements in SAL made exactly this point:



They could even have claimed 140 years, because the former shop building on the corner was built back in 1847 on the site of an old farmhouse which had been turned into a bakery at least ten years earlier - see Lot 2 in the "Hunting Box" sale notice elsewhere in this exhibition! The eventual buyer was another baker, John Louch, who put up the handsome corner shop (now a private house), and also operated it for several years as a pub "The Wheatsheaf".



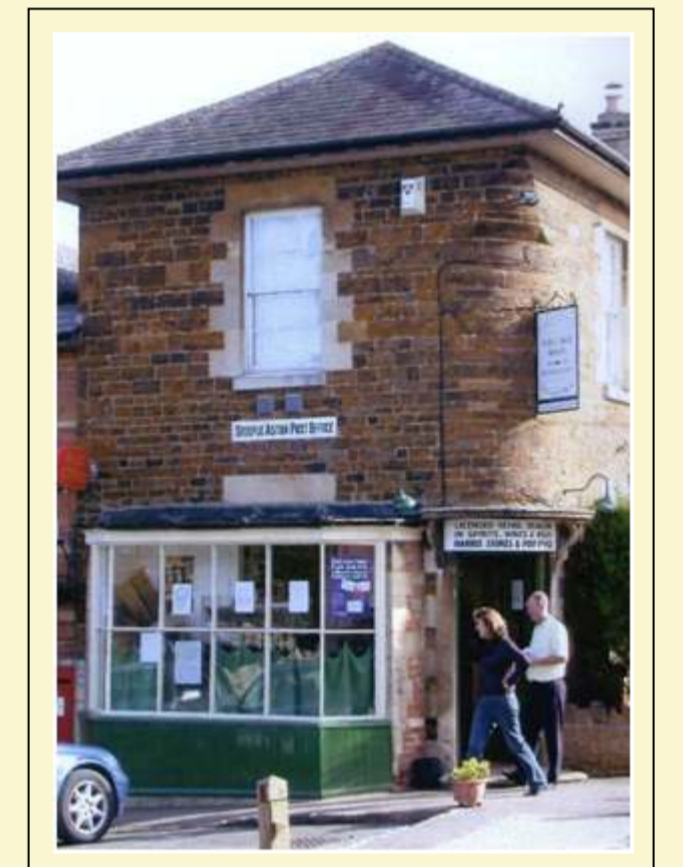
In the later 19th century it doubled as a Post Office, with Caroline Grace as the postmistress and her brother John as "draper and grocer". In the early 20th century it became Harris's Stores, run by John Watson Harris and other members of his family.



By the time SAL came along in the 1970s Harris's Stores was in the hands of John and Eunice Walker, followed in 1982 by Julie and John Wain. The hand-drawn adverts from those days seem to offer remarkably low prices - was whisky really only £2-49 a bottle? New proprietors came and went. In 1994 Marilyn and Graham Woolley announced they were handing over to Paul and Jo Greenwood; four years later the baton passed to Peter and Sue Holloway; they proclaimed their shop a SPAR, but continued to advertise it as Harris's Stores. In June 2001 Peter, Sue, Scott and Stephanie, also left, and Debra Smith took over.



The interior of the shop around 1960



From 2002 to 2007 the shop belonged to the Peaceful Trading Company - Andrew and Sharon Peace (above). At the end of their tenure, they moved the shop into the stable buildings north of the main house, which was converted into purely residential accommodation and sold separately.

The converted stable block, with accommodation above, became the new-style village shop in 2008, in the capable hands of a partnership of Sri Lankan Tamils: Ponnuthurai Kularajakaran and his cousin Sithamparappillai Parimelalagar - more familiarly known to us as Raj and Pari.