

# SULGRAVE VILLAGE SHOP AND POST OFFICE

## A SEVENTEEN YEAR SUCCESS STORY



Over the last seventeen years, Sulgrave Village Shop and Post Office has become established as the beating heart of Sulgrave Village. The success of the shop, which came into being in 2004 in response to the need, expressed by many residents, for a local shopping and post office facility, has exceeded all expectations and the local population cannot imagine what life would be like without it. As well as providing a much needed retail outlet, the shop has developed into a social hub for the village and many residents call in as much for a chat and to catch up on gossip as they do to stock up on groceries.

The shop is a community project run largely by volunteers on a not-for-profit basis. As well as serving the residents of Sulgrave, it draws customers from many surrounding villages and, as its fame spreads, attracts shoppers from an ever increasing catchment in addition to pulling in lots of passing trade.



Sited in the old village reading room, the shop is tiny but customers often liken it to Dr Who's Tardis and are amazed at the range of products available. In addition to all the basics, the shop has a delicatessen, sells fresh fruit and vegetables, locally produced free range eggs, freshly baked bread, pasties and sausage rolls and stocks chilled food and drinks, frozen ready-meals, a carefully chosen wine selection, newspapers and many, many other items. Freshly brewed coffee and other hot drinks are available and, at weekends, the aromas of hot croissants and pains-au-chocolat prove irresistible to passers'by.

The Post Office has proved a godsend to residents (especially the older members of the community) who can now draw cash and receive their pensions without having to travel to Banbury or Brackley.

The shop is a brilliant example of what a community can do if it puts its mind to it. The management committee, all of whom are volunteers, put in a huge amount of effort to ensure that everything operates smoothly and the volunteers themselves jointly contribute an estimated 90 hours of their time each week. Two part-time shop supervisors oversee management of stock, handle many of the back office tasks and superintend front-of-house shop and post office duties but all other input is down to volunteers.

With trade increasing year on year, Sulgrave Village Shop is bucking the trend in declining sales seen in many retail outlets and there is little doubt that it will continue to provide an invaluable service, both practical and social, for many years to come.



## WHAT IS SOLD AT THE SHOP?

Approximately 1500 items are currently on the stock list and these include tinned, jarred and dried goods, household consumables and basic medical items, dairy, chilled and frozen products including an assortment of ready-meals, a delicatessen section, a wide variety of breads, cakes and biscuits, a carefully selected range of wines with individually labelled tasting notes, beers, ciders, spirits, a selection of soft drinks, fresh fruit and vegetables, stationery and greetings cards, newspapers and tobacco products. The shop is also an agent for a dry-cleaning company so clothes can be deposited and collected at the premises.

The Shop sells bread baked by a local bakery, purchases vegetables from a local supplier and sells bottled organic apple juice and cider vinegar made from apples grown in a local orchard. Village residents with fruit trees in their gardens are invited to offer the shop any surplus fruit such as cooking apples or plums. The Shop also stocks a range of specialist spice-mixes (harissa, tagine and lemon paste) produced commercially by one of the village residents.

The Shop has a coffee machine (which can also make tea, hot chocolate and soup). Reusable cups are available and a discount on a cup of coffee is offered for customers who use these or bring their own cups. A range of pastries is on offer. Sausage rolls and pasties are baked every day and, at weekends, freshly-baked croissants and pains-au-chocolat are on sale.

Illustrations of just a few of these products can be seen in the following photographs:



Croissants and pains-au-chocolat are freshly baked at weekends.





Freshly produced local produce is preferred wherever possible.





Daily newspapers and good value wines always available.





Volunteers of all ages! Many of the youngsters greatly value their shop experience as contributing towards gaining the coveted Duke of Edinburgh's gold and silver awards. For seventeen years the number of volunteers has remained constant at around 45.





Visit of Andrea Leadsom MP.



The shop has played a vital role in continuing to provide for the basic shopping needs of the village throughout the various stages of the Covid pandemic. Right from the announcement of the first lockdown the Committee continuously reviewed and adapted the shopping procedures to accommodate the ever changing statutory requirements. A system of telephoned orders and doorstep deliveries was soon in place, with limited personal access being restored as the situation evolved. In recognition of the unstinting efforts of the volunteers the shop was awarded a County “Rose of Northamptonshire Award” with the citation *“in recognition of the hard work and determination you have shown when faced with the unprecedented threat from the Coronavirus outbreak – keeping our communities together and those most at risk safe.”*







During the lockdown – orders are made up and packed for deliveries to village households.



Fresh bread delivered three times a week whatever the weather.





Fifth birthday celebrations.



Interviewed by Radio Northampton





Tenth Anniversary Celebrations.





The village is noted for its "Advent Calendar Displays", usually decorated windows, unveiled daily in early evening from the 1<sup>st</sup> to the 24<sup>th</sup> December. Here the only village bus shelter, opposite the shop, is transformed. No problem, there is no longer a regular bus service!





The village shop plays its part in this village celebration, always especially decorating one of its windows.





Every two years Sulgrave hosts a National Garden Scheme (NGS) to raise money for charity. The shop remains open and proves very popular staffed, as always, by its volunteers.





This fine seat outside the shop is very popular with passing cyclists, who can get a “coffee and a cake” at a modest price. It celebrates the life of a much loved community postman, whose life was sadly cut short in 2012. It was paid for entirely by public subscription. The photograph shows another important shop function, advertising on postcards, which still has an important part to play in village life despite the internet.



"John the Post" at the village shop's 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary. He was forgiven some rather late mail deliveries because he had other important messages: *"Mrs.....doesn't look well this morning....I think someone should pop round and see her....."* The village is fortunate that his son is also our local postman and has taken on that role.



The shop has been lucky to have an expert DIY volunteer (on the left in the photograph) who, among many other things has made this wonderful barrow for displaying fresh fruit and vegetables..







Outdoor events are common in summer.





It is Shop policy to always have two volunteers/staff present in the shop at any one time.  
Couples are always welcome.



## CONTINUING A VILLAGE TRADITION



This was the village shop in 1898.....



.....but one hundred years later it had ceased trading and had been converted into a house. The once busy shop front presented a forlorn picture. Residents old and new were determined that the village should have its shop back and when the attractive 18<sup>th</sup> century "Reading Room" became available a committee was soon formed. There were doubts in some minds that such a small building could be turned into a thriving retail outlet whilst retaining its "listed building" character but the faith and persistence of the original volunteers prevailed. Once the Post Office became involved success was assured and by 2004 the operation was up and running.

The photographs in this booklet have been selected from the village website ([www.sulgrave.org](http://www.sulgrave.org)) which has promoted and advertised the shop throughout the seventeen years of its existence. I hope that it will give some idea of the life of our much valued shop and indeed, the life of our village.

Colin Wootton (Editor. Sulgrave Village Website)





These can be made to order and collected later piping hot. Much appreciated by those still working the land locally, especially in the winter and the many delivery drivers.

