

The Shop: How it Happened

When, in 2004, the villagers of East Knoyle heard that their post office and shop, situated on the corner of Wise Lane, was going to close they were devastated at losing such an important part of village life. The parish council soon realised that there was such a strong desire for keeping a post office and shop in the village that an action group was set up. They began the long and complicated process of finding support and funding to establish a new one. The first step was to create a local not-for-profit providence society – effectively a trading charity – in which all villagers could become shareholders.

By the time the original post office actually closed in February 2004, the action group had become a Board of Directors and had started applying for grants. Since the site of the old post office had become the retiring post master's home a different site had to be found for the new one. The decision was taken to put up a new post office/shop on the site of the village bus shelter which had become almost redundant as there were only two buses a week to East Knoyle.

By February 2005 building and planning could start with grants of over £140,000 from funding bodies such as Defra, Cranborne Chase, AONB and the Post Office Restart Fund, a remarkable £30,000 through local fundraising and numerous donations from villagers.

The group chose to bank with the Co-op Bank because of its ethical approach and because of its great support and encouragement in the planning stages. The Co-op Bank continues to be a great ally to Wren's Shop.

Wren's Shop, named after [Sir Christopher Wren](#) who was born in the village of East Knoyle where his father was rector, was officially opened on 23 rd June 2006 by [Terry Pratchett](#), the renowned author who lives in the area.

The compact shop consists of a post office counter, a store room at the back, kitchen, toilet (for volunteer shop assistants) and a sorting room for the village postman. It is open seven days a week from 7.15am to 6.00pm Monday to Saturday and on Sundays from 9.00am to 12.00pm. Wren's Shop stocks everyday essentials such as milk, fresh baked bread, tea, eggs and fresh meat as well as tinned food of all kinds, wine and beer and some deli speciality lines like champagne – chilled, of course – Gentleman's Relish and trout terrine. A special effort is made to source fresh produce from local suppliers.

Janeen Evans, the postmistress, is the only employee, paid by the Post Office. Officially she works three hours a day but, in fact, works many more hours, unpaid! She has an increasing parcel and business mail work load from people who work and mail out from home.

Volunteers work on the till and fill the shelves as well as many other jobs. Incredibly there are over sixty, about a third of whom do regular weekly shifts. Many others come in as and when they can. Over the last couple of years, some volunteers have developed specialist skill such as booking in wholesalers deliveries, sorting and pricing stock, checking sell-by dates, cleaning floors and windows. It is true to say that there is a great sense of "ownership" amongst the volunteers who on their "days off" are also customers and shareholders!!

Services provided by the shop and post office include dry cleaning, daily newspapers, photo-copying, free access to the Internet and doctor's prescription collection and delivery. It also acts as a box office for local events and underwrites the monthly film show put on by Moviola in the village hall and supports the First Responders who provide emergency first aid in the area.

Over the past three years Wren's shop has been operating very successfully and because of its volunteer staff has generated good profits while maintaining competitive pricing. These profits are all returned to the community. Some is ploughed back into the shop with the purchase of capital items like a chillers, freezers, better shelving units and a second till. Others are distributed externally - a annual rent is paid to the Parish Council funds, community events are supported, and donations are made perhaps to a one-off cause, helping the Parish Council in the purchase of an area of woodland, or on a regular basis such as an annual donation towards a youth activity week.

Most importantly the shop has become a social centre, a meeting place where villagers can stand around and chat while doing their shopping. East Knoyle faced the threat of becoming just a dormitory area but thanks to the shop the whole village has come to life again with a wonderful community spirit. In fact, estate agents are now able to advertise houses as being "in the lively village of East Knoyle."