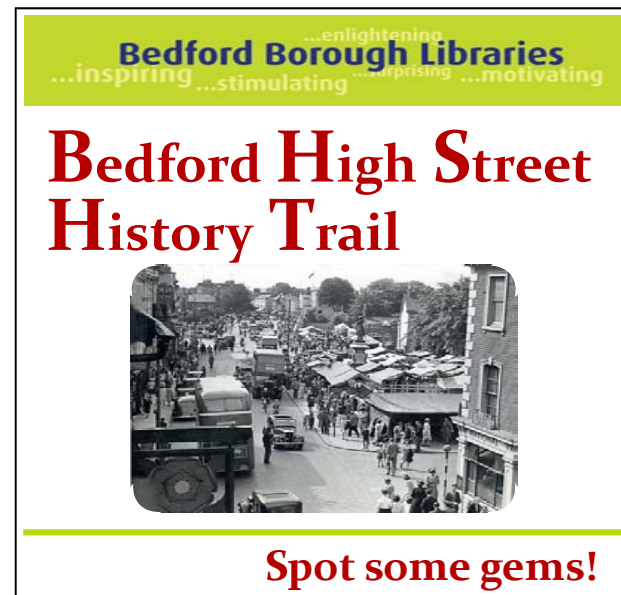


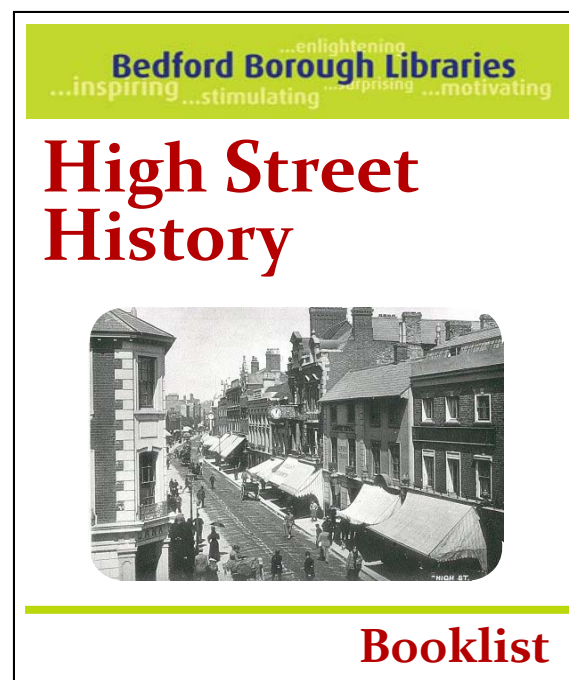
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**Half a Pound of Tuppenny Rice,  
Half a Pound of Treacle:  
Shopping in Bedford High Street  
c. 1800 to 1970**



**Bedford High Street History Project Group**

This booklet was compiled by staff at Bedford Central Library.  
Research was done by the Bedford High Street History Project  
Group.

Contacts for the Bedford High Street History Project Group:

Sally Heard, Hilary McDonald and Barry Stephenson  
Bedford Central Library, Harpur Street, Bedford MK40 1PG  
Tel : 01234 718178

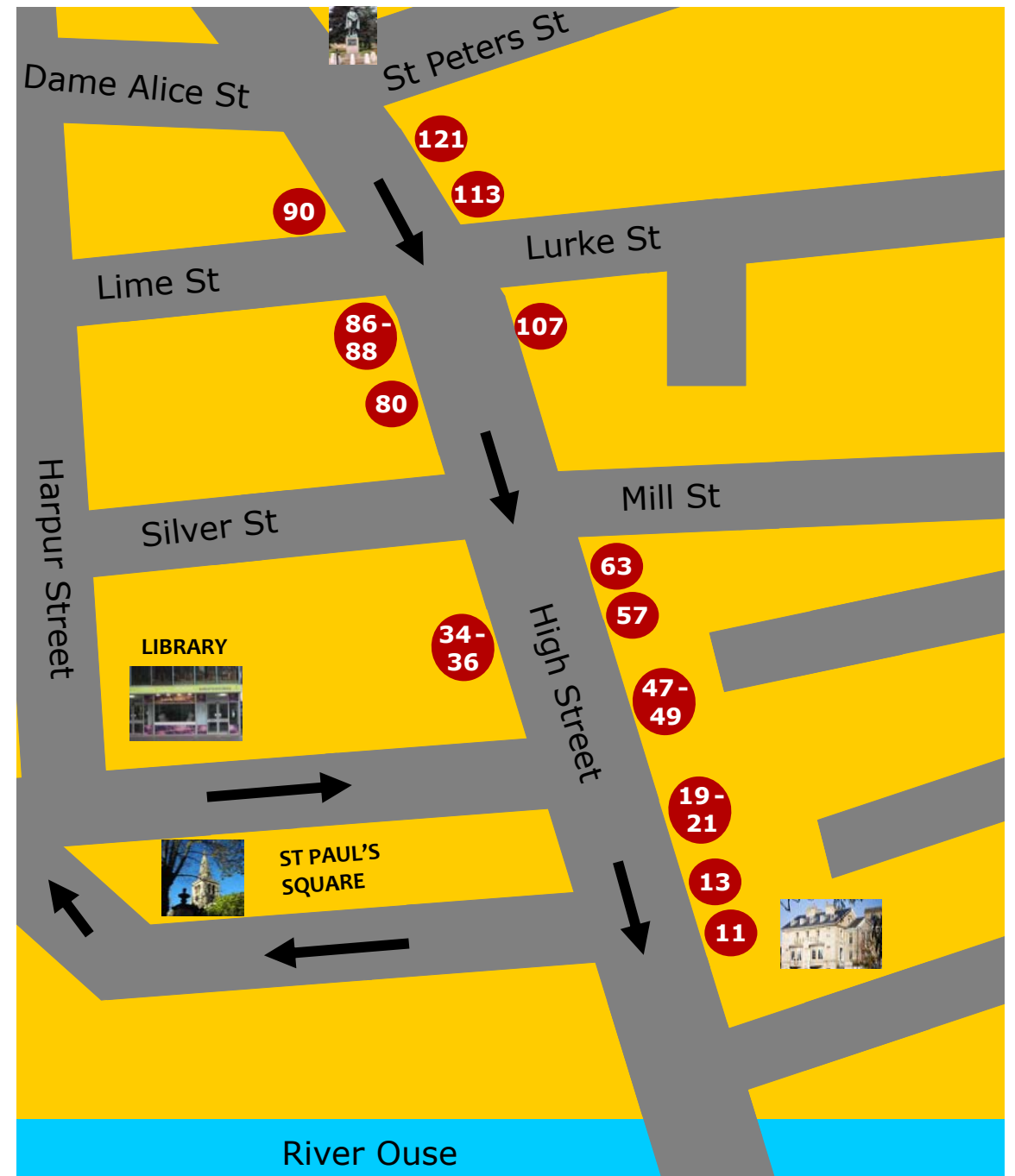
## Half a Pound of Tuppenny Rice, Half a Pound of Treacle: Shopping in Bedford High Street c. 1800 to 1970



1926 OS map of Bedford Sheet X1.16

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# Introduction

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The story of Bedford's High Street is a reflection of the town's social development. This booklet dips into that past by illuminating the history of a few of the many fascinating shops and businesses which thrived there during the past two centuries.

The catalyst for embarking on this project, *Shopping in Bedford High Street c.1800 to 1970*, (set up by staff at Bedford Central Library) was a BBC One series, broadcast in the Autumn of 2010, *Turn Back Time – The High Street*. This showed how shops changed radically between the Victorian era and the 1970s. The programme makers also invited members of the public to investigate and record the history of shopping in their own locality. So with a great deal of help from Margaret Badley, a group of researchers\* was set up to investigate the history of some of the shops in Bedford High Street. Although the core period for the project was roughly 80 years from 1890, some of the businesses selected were set up long before this, hence the title.

Shops researched ranged from jewellers to ironmongers, to gunsmiths and more than one draper's business, appropriately enough since there were so many in the High Street and elsewhere in Bedford in the 19<sup>th</sup> and first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Some of the shops though long gone, are still familiar names, Hockliffe and Dudeney & Johnston, for example. Others are still going strong and have been patronised by generations of Bedford's shoppers: Goldings and Harrison & Simmonds. There are still clues left of past businesses in the buildings of the High Street: a date, a monogram, if you have a careful look.

This has been a great opportunity to start to pull together the reams of information about shops in our High Street which is scattered between Bedford Library, Bedfordshire and Luton Archives and Records Service (BLARS), Bedford Museum and also the Historic Environment Record (HER). All of these are open to the public for further research apart from Bedford Museum which is closed for refurbishment and will re-open in late 2012.

Part of the project's aim is to publish more information on Bedford Borough Libraries' Virtual Library about the shops researched, to complement the excerpts in this booklet and to provide details of sources so that others will be inspired to delve into our town's past.

\* Stuart Antrobus, Terry Darlow, David Fowler, Sally Heard, Hilary McDonald, Cathy Moorhouse, Elizabeth Mortimer, Jennifer Salter and Barry Stephenson.

Sally Heard  
Hilary McDonald  
Barry Stephenson

May 2011

## Explanation about the research

The pieces which follow are excerpts from the research done by members of the Bedford High Street History Project Group. For each business, more information, additional images and sources are being added to Bedford Borough Libraries Virtual Library.

[www.bedford.gov.uk](http://www.bedford.gov.uk) click on Libraries, click on Local and Family History and then look under 'Local Subjects' for entries on 'Shops' and 'Streets'.

# Adkin and Sons

## Gunsmiths

11 High Street, Bedford and then moved to....

57 High Street, Bedford



57 High Street 2011  
© SH

### Timeline

- 1821: Henry Adkin was born on the 29<sup>th</sup> May in Bungay, Suffolk, his father was a gunsmith. As a youth he went to work for Mr Piper who was a gunsmith in Cambridge.
- 1844: Henry moved to Bedford and took over the business of Mr Rosier a gunsmith whose shop was at 1 Offa Street, now Tavistock Street, opposite The Flower Pot public house.
- 1850: Henry married Ellen Carter whose father Charles Carter was a prominent local politician. While living in Offa Street their first child Ellen was born. They had one servant William Bowel who like Henry was also born in Bungay. Shortly afterwards he moved to premises in St Mary's Street and there he built a rifle range at the back of his shop, where according to The Bedfordshire Times, "it became the resort of many of the gentry of the neighbourhood". Among those who went here to practise was Colonel Burnaby, cavalry officer, traveller and balloonist who was killed at Abu Klea in 1885 while serving with the relief expedition to save General Gordon at Khartoum.
- 1861c: By 1861 he had moved his shop to 11 High Street, Bedford and at this address his staff consisted of one workman and two apprentices while also employing two servants. While living here his sons Henry, William, Alfred and daughters Catherine, Gertrude and Alice were born. By 1871 his workforce had increased to two men and three apprentices.
- 1872: He moved his shop to 57 High Street, which had been a butcher's shop owned by George Jones. He pulled the building down and built his new shop with a workshop at the rear. The architect was John Usher and the design was in the Venetian Gothic style with two gun dogs and "HA" initials carved in stone on the fascia of the building. Exeter sculptor Harry Hems modelled the gun dogs.
- 1876-1880c: For a short period Henry Adkin had a shop at 3 Wentworth Street, Peterborough.
- 1890: His two sons Henry Charles and William Frederick joined the firm and the shop was renamed Adkin and Sons. Shortly afterwards a workshop was established in Castle Road which closed in the early 1900s. The manufacture of guns and pistols ceased 1900c but sporting guns were made until 1939.
- 1893: Mrs Ellen Adkin died aged 68.
- 1914: Henry Adkin, the founder of the firm died aged 93.
- 1915: William Henry Adkin, William's son joined the firm on leaving school.
- 1923: Henry Charles Adkin, son of the founder Henry Adkin died aged 68.
- 1932: Mrs Annie Elizabeth Adkin wife of William Frederick Adkin died in November at their home at 179 Hurst Grove. The couple had two sons William Henry and Robert Checkley and two daughters Doris Caroline and Vera Gertrude. Annie was the only child of Mr & Mrs William Fisher Checkley and was born at Moulton, Northamptonshire.



Source Bedfordshire & Luton  
Archives & Records Service

- 1935: William Frederick Adkin, son of the founder Henry Adkin died on the 4<sup>th</sup> June at his home, 179 Hurst Grove aged 78. He was born in 1857 and educated at Bedford Modern School. He married Annie Elizabeth Checkley of Moulton, Northamptonshire and their two sons William Henry and Robert Checkley joined him in the family business. When a young man he was an accomplished skater and rower.
- 1939: Robert Checkley died on the 20<sup>th</sup> December aged 37 years at his home, 34 Putnoe Lane, Bedford leaving his widow Vera and a son, Mark, three years old. A keen sportsman he played rugby for the East Midlands and Bedford Athletic. He was also a member of Bedford Rowing Club and rowed for the club at Henley Regatta for many years and took part in the Thames Head of the River Race on three occasions.
- 1952: William Henry Adkin, grandson of the founder and sole surviving business member of the family died on 27<sup>th</sup> December at 179 Hurst Grove Bedford aged 53. William, a bachelor, had served during the First World War with the Royal Artillery in France and Germany. A keen sportsman, he captained the Bedford Thursday Hockey Club during the 1920s and he was a member of the Riverside Lawn Tennis Club.
- 1953: The premises at 57 High Street were sold at auction for £18,000. The business continued under the same name in the new premises at 61 Midland Road. The shop at 57 High Street became Dunn & Co.
- 1967c: The business moved to new premises at 25 Greyfriars.
- 1993: The two gun dogs, which appeared above the shop at 57 High Street, had been stolen some years ago only to be recently found in Castle Lane car park. Bedford Borough Council restored them at a cost of £8,000 and the two stone dogs were put back in their original place above the shop at 57 High Street on the restored gable.
- 2000c: The firm finally closed.



57 High Street 2011  
© SH

# Belfast Linen Warehouse

## Drapers

11 High Street, Bedford

According to Bedford Borough Council's Bedford High Street Heritage Gazetteer of November 2008, 11 Bedford High Street was constructed in the late c18 by an as yet unidentified architect. The Post Office Directory of 1869 shows Henry Adkin, 'Gun, rifle & pistol maker' at 11 High Street. He is not listed amongst private residents of Bedford and probably lived above the shop. Barry Stephenson's research on Henry Adkin's business has ascertained that he had moved there c.1861 and remained until 1872. He is shown as resident there in the 1871 Census. Cherry & Gilpin, drapers, are listed as next door at No.13.

The 1871 Census records Bedford as having a population of 16,849. It was a town well served with drapery shops. A fact that seems to have escaped attention from historians is that of competition between similar businesses. For example, The Post Office Directory of 1869 lists a total of 17 drapery businesses in the High Street competing with one another as well as with drapery businesses in other parts of the town.

The County Advertisements section of Kelly's Directory of Bedfordshire 1890, shows William Gilpin, now both at 11 & 13 High Street, as 'a Draper, Silk Mercer &c', also listing millinery; mantles; dressmaking; wedding trousseaux; India outfits and 'Funerals Conducted'. Where to Buy at Bedford, published in 1891 has an etching showing 11 & 13 High Street, owned by Mr W. Gilpin, Draper etc. and describes it as one of the 'elegant establishments' in the High Street, an 'old-established and well organised concern' with each department 'kept as distinct as is found practicable, and each having its own particular staff of assistants.' The three-storied elevation 'extends some way to the rear' and the shop provided dress, mantle making and millinery.

The commercial section of Kelly's Directory of Bedfordshire 1894 (the year that electricity was introduced to Bedford) shows Kirkbride, William (late Cherry & Gilpin) occupying 11 & 13 High Street as 'draper & silk mercer & funeral furnisher, novelties and specialities in costumes, mantles, millinery & lace goods, wedding trousseaux & Indian & Colonial outfits a speciality.' The business features in the County Advertisement section and he is listed in the residential section as living at 46 Gery Street, Bedford.

By 1901, Bedford had a population of 35,000 and the census that year shows 11 & 13 High Street occupied by Arthur Field Pearman (age 39), his wife Amy Elizabeth (age 32) a son, John Lloyd Pearman (age 2) and 8 females including Bertha Hammett (age 71). Apart from the aged Bertha, it is likely that most of the other women were assistants or apprentices in the shop, with one or two possibly being domestic servants. The shop must have been doing well to support so many people.

Kelly's Directory of Bedfordshire of 1903 lists Arthur Field Pearmain as a draper at 11 & 13 High Street (nb the variation in the spelling of the surname; census information was completed by the census taker, not the occupants themselves). In the 1911 Census, 11 & 13 High Street are still conjoined, but after 1925 they became separated. Arthur Day took over No 13 in 1926 and by 1928 the Belfast Linen Warehouse was established at No 11. By this period Bedford was expanding again and the 1931 Census shows the town's population as 42,606. The Bedford Directory of 1936 lists the proprietor of 11 High Street, as Ingram Stephen Hubbard and includes an advertisement for the business.

The Belfast Linen Warehouse's website provides a brief history of the firm which was founded by Harold Nichols. Nichols, an ambitious young man who, having learned the linen sales trade in Birmingham and saved £100 (a very substantial amount then), wanted to be his own boss. Prior to WW1 he bought a leasehold property in Cambridge and named it Belfast Linen to prompt associations with the quality linen warehouses in Belfast. By 1914 he had another shop in King's Lynn which he left to be run by his youngest, and only unmarried sister, whilst he served in a cavalry unit. On his return he bought two more stores, one of which was 11 High Street, Bedford. This and his other shops



Advertisement from 1934 Bedford Directory



Cherry & Gilpin at Nos 11 and 13 High Street, Bedford. From 'Where to Buy at Bedford' 1891

In November 2010, on a visit to Bedford Central Library's 'Turn Back Time' display, L.D. wrote down her reminiscences of shopping at the Belfast Linen Warehouse over several decades: 'The Belfast Linen Warehouse was a very well-used and popular shop that we used regularly. They had an excellent variety of household linens at very reasonable prices. I left Bedford in the early fifties but on return visits when much of the High Street closed and changed Belfast Linen traded on in the same shop and with quality items - I remember buying items for presents - I remember buying themed tea towels - I even took one on the theme of John Bunyan out to West Africa where I worked. My friends there felt I didn't know enough about the man - but he was before my time!' The writer said she had worked in West Africa for 19 years.

The Belfast Linen Warehouse continued at No.11 High Street until c.1995 when, along with the other 20 shops that the chain had expanded to, the firm turned away from linen supplies owing to the increasing competition from hypermarkets and internet shopping.

Belfast Linen (between Arthur Day and Eastern Electricity), 1969  
© Historic Environment Record, Bedford Borough Council

thrived until the outbreak of WW2 in 1939 (his sons Douglas and Kenneth served as Spitfire pilots) when it became impossible to acquire new stock. However, Harold Nichols kept his remaining stock and resumed trading in 1946. The 1947 Bedford Street Directory records J.S. Hubbard as proprietor.

It appears that the Belfast Linen Warehouse was on a lease as 11 High Street was put up for sale by auction on 7 March 1956 by joint auctioneers W&H Peacock, 6 Dame Alice Street, Bedford and Wm Houghton & Sons (Valuers) Ltd, 7 & 8 Chandos Street, London W1.

Kelly's Directory of Bedford & Neighbourhood 1961 shows only three High Street drapery businesses: at No 11, Belfast Linen Warehouse 'household & fancy linen, soft furnishings and dress fabrics'; E.P. Rose department store at Nos 45-54 and B&W Linen Shops Ltd at No. 82 High Street.

Ten years later, Kelly's Directory of Bedford & Kempston 1970/71 shows that the Belfast Linen Warehouse at No. 11 and E.P. Rose department store are still in the High Street. B&W Linen shop has gone, but Shalets drapers is now at No.44. In the space of a century, competition between High Street drapery businesses has significantly reduced, there is a market for ready-made textiles, both clothes and furnishing and 'make do and mend' becomes increasingly replaced with cheap factory made imported goods which are not expected to last. At my primary school in Kent in the mid 1940s, girls were taught how to sew on buttons and darn socks!



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# Blotts

## Drapers

113 High Street, Bedford

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Exterior of Salvation Army shop previously Blotts, 2011  
© Elizabeth Mortimer

The draper's shop at 113 High Street was run initially by Walter Blott, who was born at Midloe Grange near St Neots, the son of a farmer. He started business in St Neots Market Place. He moved to Bedford in approximately 1888 and it would appear that he took over the drapery business at 113 High Street from Ezra Braggins, who moved to the site now occupied by Beales on the corner of Silver Street and Harpur Street.

Walter Blott was living at 11 Goldington Road with his wife, Maria, and their large family by the time the 1891 census was taken. His eight sons were called Reginald, Walter, Ivo, Leonard, Shirley, Jonathon, Arthur and Roy. He had at least three daughters and perhaps a fourth, as I have found a possible discrepancy between the names on the census and in the obituary mentioned below. They appear to have been called Olive, Hilda, Mary and Ivy Madge. Walter died in 1922 at the age of seventy-one, two years into retirement. His oldest son, Reginald, took on the management of the shop, assisted by his brother, Shirley. According to his obituary, Walter Blott "was a regular attendant at Providence Baptist Chapel, Rothsay Road," which dates back to 1894, "and he took a great interest in that place of worship, of which he was a trustee and sides man." The High Street shop appears to have been rebuilt in the early years of the twentieth century and there were further developments and extensions of the business over the years. I obtained my information from the 1891 census, building plans which are kept in the Archives, and Walter Blott's obituary in the issue of the Bedfordshire Times and Independent dated 27th October, 1922.

I was delighted to discover that the mother of a friend of mine from Christ Church Bedford, Olive Kirby had worked at Blotts. Olive started her working life by serving a three year apprenticeship at a little baby linen shop in Harpur Street, which was later taken over by Halfords. She then worked briefly at the Manchester and Bradford just across the road, before moving on to Blotts, in 1935 "because Mr Blott needed someone." She did not have an interview for the job. She thinks Mr Blott came to her home and asked her to go and work for him. He would have known her, because both families attended Providence Baptist Chapel in Rothsay Road. Olive has no particular recollection of her first day at Blotts, referring to it simply as quite an ordinary day. She describes Mr Reginald Blott as a tall man, who was a nice person to work for. His daughters, not necessarily in age order, were Dorothea, Audrey, Lois, Emma, Ruth, Ranah, Joyce, Olive and Joan. Reginald had just two sons, Paul and Timothy.

The people Olive worked with at Blotts included Marjorie Flood. Olive was also able to name Dorothy Day, Miss Perkins, Miss Hall, Joan Housden, Miss Black and Miss Fletcher. Olive described for me the upstairs of the shop, which was a show room that sold coats and other items of ladies' clothing. Downstairs was what they called the Manchester Department, with sheets, blankets and other bed linen, plus various household goods, including tea-towels. There was also fabric for dress-making, haberdashery items and knitting wool for sale. Olive worked at various times in the haberdashery and the gloves and hosiery departments and finally in the Manchester Department. None of the employees lived on the premises at that time. Blotts was located on the east side of Bedford High Street, on the northern side of the junction with Lurke Street. The premises are now occupied by the Salvation Army Charity Shop. Olive told me that she has been in there, but that the large building has been changed to such a degree over the years that she hardly recognised it. Olive used to travel to and from Blotts from her home in Palmerston Street on her bicycle. For reasons unknown to her, the top floor of the three storey building was referred to as "the cellar"! She and Marjorie Flood used to do fire watching up there during the War. When asked how much she was paid, Olive's reply was: "Not very much. I think, when I left, I was getting about twenty-eight shillings a week." That is £1.40 in today's money!



Interior of Salvation Army Shop, previously Blotts, 2011  
© Elizabeth Mortimer

Olive married Archie Kirby from Renhold on 4 April, 1940, some seven months into the War. Olive left her employment at Blotts then, as married women were not allowed to continue working in those days. However, she returned to Blotts, after Archie was called up in the June to serve in the Army. He was imprisoned in Thailand and did not return home until November, 1945, at which time, Olive left Blotts for the last time. She thinks the shop closed fairly soon after that, either at the end of 1945 or during 1946. It had certainly gone and been replaced by Richards Shops by the time the 1947 Kelly's Directory, the first one I could find after the War, was published. Looking back on her time at Blotts, Olive remembers finding the people she worked with very pleasant and also getting on well with everybody. It was not as easy going as it is these days. It was quite different in the management and how they worked.



Olive Kirby as a young girl  
© Olive Kirby

More information about Blott's came from Eva Bunn (née Woolston) who was born on 11th August, 1917, just a few days after Olive Kirby. Eva lived in Park Road with her two brothers and four sisters and attended the Girls' Modern School, which became the Dame Alice Harpur School, and remembers the three youngest Blott girls being there, that is Olive, Joyce and Ranah. Eva did not often shop in Blotts. The implication seems to be that it was a little on the exclusive and expensive side. I received a similar comment from Dora Chamberlain (née Caress), who was born in 1914, and from Rona Rowlands (née Alcock), who was born in 1930. Peggy Palmer told me that Mr (Reginald) Blott used to offer to give a copy of John Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress" to anyone who did not have one.

On the BBC's WW2 People's War website, I found an item about Dorothy Turner (née Day), one of the people Olive Kirby remembers working with, which states: "I started working at Blotts the drapers in the High Street, aged 14 years old in 1937. At the beginning of the war I was asked to do the Fire Watch at night time which involved myself and my friend sleeping overnight (on a staff rota) at the top of the shop, the second floor of the old building. If there had been any trouble we would have had to contact Mr Fuller, who owned and lived in the garage in Lurke Street, at the rear end of the shop. Fortunately, we didn't get into any difficulties as we hadn't had any training".

Gwen Gribble (born in 1931) remembers that, when she was a child, her mother, Miriam, and her aunt used to meet at Blotts at three o'clock on a Tuesday afternoon. They used to buy knitting wool and the price was given as one three (which was a penny three farthings) or two three (which was tuppence three farthings). Cynthia White moved to Bedford in 1959, long after Blotts shop closed, but she does remember the three tall Miss Blotts (Joan, Emma and Ranah), who lived opposite her family on Goldington Road and rode stately upright bicycles.

# John Bull

Jewellers & Silversmiths  
47 & 49 High Street, Bedford



Source Bedfordshire & Luton Archives & Records Service

In 1825 a stocky little man from Kimbolton named John Bull (1802-1870), son of a butcher, established a small business as a jeweller and silversmith in Bedford, having served an apprenticeship from 1817. He later moved his business to 49 High Street, Bedford, in premises which had previously been a butcher's (Ram Yard recalls the days when sheep and cattle were driven down the side passage to the slaughter house at the back). The original shop had two small mullioned glass windows and a step leading to the door in the centre. There was living accommodation above. Trade directory entries for subsequent years indicate that his firm also embraced gun making, watch and clock making and dealing in 'optical instruments'.

John Bull married a Miss Priestman who bore him four sons and two daughters. John was a humanitarian, as is clear from the way he reacted when two burglars were caught red-handed in his shop. Since burglary was then a capital offence, the two men were condemned to death. But John pleaded for leniency and their sentence was commuted to long terms of imprisonment in Australia. Years later, John received a letter from one of the men, who had since made good and wanted to thank him for his help during the trial.

John Bull eventually moved his family home to Kimbolton Road and could be seen each morning, driving his pony-chaise down the High Street to his shop. He left the transport at the Coach and Horses pub which was opposite the present Corn Exchange, by St Paul's Church. When he died in 1870 his two sons Richard and Thomas took over the business. They decided to pull down the premises, by now dilapidated, with rats in the living rooms and in the basement.

In its place they erected the present building with its elaborate brick façade, with large projecting clock and golden bull (a pun on the family name), making one of Bedford High Street's most familiar landmarks. In addition, there was a vertical pole set back behind the clock, which carried a golden ball which could move up and down the pole but was normally set near the top. At 10.00 am each morning, the ball would drop down and strike a large bell. This was the signal for people down the High Street to set their pocket watches, since the device was set off by an electric signal which came directly from Greenwich.

Richard also became Mayor in 1870 and donated the present mayoral gold chain to the town. After Richard's sudden death in 1880, Thomas became sole proprietor and lived there above the shop. He too played an active part in the town's civic life, as a JP and a churchwarden at St Paul's Church. It was he who paid for the installation of carillon chimes which used to play tunes using the peal of bells, every hour.



© SH 2011

There is an amusing story of how, one night, Thomas was awoken when he heard a noise in the yard below, at the back of the premises. In the dim light he saw a figure apparently trying to get in through the side door. Throwing up the window, Thomas shouted to the intruder to go away or be shot. The man made no attempt to depart and appeared not to have heard, so Thomas fired a shot at the opposite wall. This seemed to have some effect, for the man disappeared. The next morning a detachable collar, with the culprit's name on, was discovered in the yard. To the great delight of the many shopkeepers of the High Street, word soon got round that one of their number had been so intoxicated the night before that he was unable to recognise his own house.

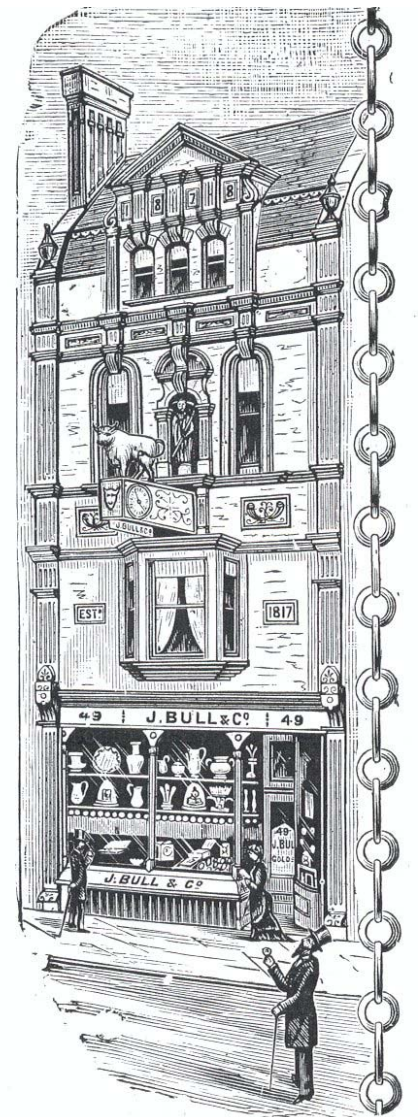
Thomas Bull retired in 1899. In 1904, his son-in-law, W.E. Ison, who had taken control of the business, bought the shop next door and enlarged the premises to embrace Nos. 47 & 49 High Street.

During the First World War, the firm became contractors to H.M. Government as makers of time fuses and of turnbuckle (devices for tightened wire on the early aircraft). Around 100 people, mostly girls and discharged soldiers were employed on the various upper floors of the enlarged premises. When Mr Ison died in 1919, that marked the end of the firm as a family business and it was made a limited company, John Bull & Co (Bedford) Ltd, which it still operates as, today, albeit in St Peter's Street.

The firm was very much the county jeweller and set a high standard of work. Their staff were known widely for their expertise. After 1918 the firm had one silversmith, two goldsmiths, and 2 or 3 watch and clockmakers in their in-house workshops, in addition to the shop staff. Memorable commissions included an engraved presentation plate for the ill-fated R101 airship, which later crashed in flames over France, and a diamond and platinum brooch presented to the Queen Mother by the Beds & Herts Regiment. In the nineteenth century, the firm had contacts with the large houses in the surrounding countryside to repair and service their clocks. Jewellery repair, altering a ring or having a gemstone fitted, was done in the firm's own workshop.

Even in the 1920s, there were still superstitious people who would call in with a small medicine bottle and request some 'gold water', the water which gold was washed in. Some people believed that it had magical properties, a hang-over from medieval belief in alchemy. One of their memorable post-war customers was a 'rag and bone' man who operated from a horse and cart. He came in twice a year, in the summer and at Christmas to buy his wife something in silver. He always paid cash in loose money.

Eventually, as workmen retired or died, the silversmith and goldsmiths, work started being sent away for repair, out of the shop. The types of watches changed over time, from the traditional winding ones to the automatic and battery-driven digital ones. The 49 High Street premises were sold by auction on 19 February 1964 and in September the firm moved to 21 St Peter's Street, Bedford, where it still trades, over 185 years after it began, one of Bedford's oldest firms.



John Bull's Shop  
From "Where to Buy at Bedford" 1891



## Arthur Day Ladies' Outfitters 13 High Street, Bedford

Arthur Day's shop, described in the 1926 Bedford Directory as a costumiers, sold women's clothes and hats. By 1928, it was listed more comprehensively and grandly as Arthur Chas. Day - costumier, furrier and milliner and by 1949 the business had become a limited company, Arthur Day (Costumiers) Ltd. From 1969 onwards, it was listed in Kelly's Directory of Bedford as a ladies' outfitters and became well-known as a specialist in bridal wear for its last 15 years of trading. Its reputation was of a shop which catered for the more exclusive end of women's fashion. This was a family business run by 3 generations.

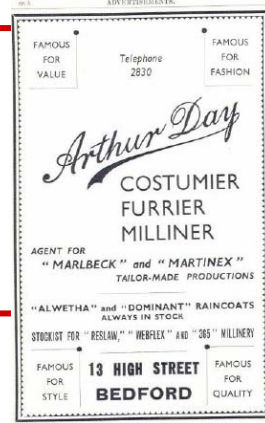
Arthur Day came down from the North to Bedford with his wife Nora, to set up a shop at number 13 High Street, in May 1926. He semi-retired in 1959 and died in 1963 aged 69. Born in Bolton, Lancashire, his son Leslie Day then ran the business together with his wife, Enid and their daughter Susan Mant. Nicholas Day, grandson of the founder, took over the reins after his father Leslie died in 1977 aged 57. Both Arthur Day and his son Leslie were keen golf players.

Number 13, High Street is a fine three storey, red-brick Victorian building, with a basement. Local directories and the official censuses from 1851 to 1901 show that drapers i.e. cloth merchants and costumiers had been in business at that address for much of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Bedfordshire Directory for 1847 lists Luke Cherry, linen draper, in business in the High Street (this was quite possibly at number 13; he was definitely installed at number 13 High Street in the 1861 census). The 1868 Bedford Directory shows Cherry & Gilpin, drapers at number 13 High Street. They later expanded to take over number 11 as well from Henry Adkin, Gunsmith and at that time were described as drapers and silk merchants.

Subsequently, Gilpin (William) & Sloper and then William Gilpin alone, also drapers, ran the business. 'Where to Buy at Bedford', published in 1891 describes the shop as elegant and as 'one of the chief houses in the [drapery] trade in this district'. At some point after 1891 another draper, William Kirkbride occupied the premises; he is listed at number 11 and 13 in the Bedford Directory for the years 1893 to 1899. The next occupier of numbers 11 and 13 High Street, from 1900 until 1925 (beginning of 1926), was Arthur Field Pearmain, described as a draper and later as a ladies' tailor and costumier. According to the 1901 census, he and his family lived at numbers 11 and 13 High Street together with a number of female employees who worked for the business as draper's assistants or dressmakers. Census records show that previous owners had also provided accommodation for their employees over the shop.

Initially, in 1926, Arthur Day's business occupied the ground floor of number 13 (number 11 was vacant when he opened the shop but was later occupied by The Belfast Linen Warehouse). A photograph of its exterior taken when it had first opened, shows a crowded shop window with an elegant costume in the centre surrounded by hats on stands. A sign with the name 'Arthur Day' is just visible propped up on the inside of the window pane. In Bedford Borough's General Rate book for October 1926, the owner of number 13 High Street was C.R.B. Tingey and the property was described as a shop and workrooms at a gross rental of £160 per annum.

Over the years, the shop had expanded to fill the whole of number 13. A member of staff who started working there in 1960 commented on how large the shop seemed 'four floors and no lift, so you kept quite fit'. She described the layout: 'The staff and tea room were on the top floor at the back plus the alteration room. On the top floor at the front were the suits, skirts, dress/jackets. The next floor down were knitwear and dresses (sizes 10 to 60 hips). On the ground floor were coats, sheepskins and rainwear. Going to the back we had the millinery. In the basement it was unpacking parcels, old models, roller rails and hangers'. As a junior she spent much of her time unpacking and packing clothes. A phone call would let staff know that the parcels had arrived. 'I seemed to spend years in that packing room. It gave you a good fashion sense and how to co-ordinate your colours'.



Advertisement from 1947  
Kelly's Directory of Bedford

By 1976, the shop was celebrating its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. When the shop opened it employed 5 staff, 50 years on in 1976, there was a staff of twenty-four. The anniversary advertisement feature in the Bedfordshire Times gives a flavour of the type of clothes sold to women of all ages and sizes. The shop 'can offer the discerning woman a superb selection in dresses, suits, coats, millinery and evening gowns'. It stocked makes such as: Eastex, Gor-Ray, Berketex, Windsmoor, Butte Knit, Dereta and Denmar Hats. Leslie Day and his wife were buyers for the various departments: coats, furs, rainwear and co-ordinates, dresses, hostess dresses, dress/jacket, dress/coats and suits. The emphasis was on service, quality and tradition. Much is made of the fact in the advertisement feature, that some manufacturers had been supplying Arthur Day since its beginnings in 1926, notably Hitchcock, Williams & Co. This was a well-known clothing firm, based until the second world war in St Paul's Churchyard, London and in business itself since the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The 1970s was a time of great change in fashion however and the feature reports how Leslie Day was 'seeking now to change the image of the shop which today sells clothes for trendy young fashion followers as well as maturer women. Maxi skirts and short tops are as equally at home in the co-ordinates department as the traditional blouses and medium length skirts'. Similarly, when Arthur Day set up shop in 1926, women's clothes retailing was undergoing enormous changes. In 1926 several drapers are listed in Bedford High Street and apart from Arthur Day, only two other costumiers. Of course, some drapers employed dressmakers and milliners; William Gilpin's advertisement in the 1890 Kelly's Directory of Beds, Herts and Northants describes his business activities as draper and silk mercer and provider of millinery, mantles, dressmaking, wedding trousseaux and India outfits. E.P Rose in 1926 although described as a draper, sold millinery, drapery and all ladies' wear.

Ten years later, in 1936, draper was becoming an old-fashioned term; more women's fashion shops and milliners had appeared on the High Street and drapers' businesses were diminishing. One reason was of course that some businesses which had previously described themselves as drapers now also called themselves costumiers and included ready-to-wear clothes. This was one of the most significant changes in women's clothing in the first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Now there was a choice between using a dressmaker or buying clothes off the peg. This opportunity was seized by Arthur Day.

By the time the shop closed in 1994 when it went into voluntary liquidation, Bedford had changed. Its retailing centre had moved towards Midland Road. Arthur Day's grandson blamed the business's forced closure on the demise of the High Street and the failure to redevelop it.



Doll's house created by Arthur Day  
© Cecil Higgins Art Gallery & Bedford Museum 2011.  
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## Dudeny & Johnston & Dujon Restaurant

Grocers, Provision Merchants, Bakers, Confectioners,  
Wine, Spirit and Beer Merchants

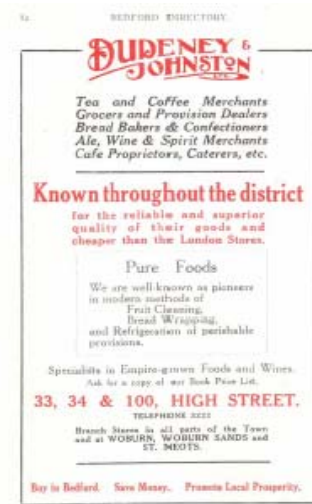
33 High Street, Bedford (in 1893)

33 and 100 High Street (by 1900)

33, 34 and 100 High Street (by 1903 up to 1936)

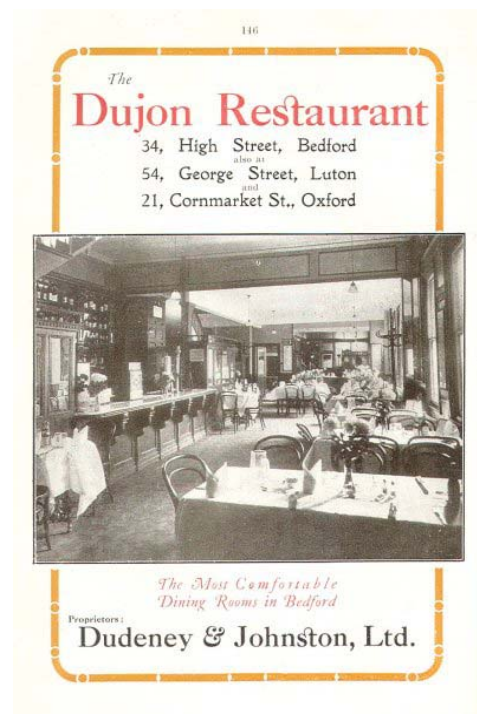
34/36 High Street (by 1938)

Information from Bedford Directories



Advertisement from 1929  
Bedford Directory

### A memory of Dudeny and Johnston in the 1950s



Advertisement from 1922 Bedford Directory

It was started in 1893 by George Dudeny and George Johnston trading as a small grocery business which then grew into Bedford's first supermarket with 24 branches in Bedfordshire, Hertfordshire and Buckinghamshire. At the High Street shop there was a dance hall which held regular Saturday night dances in the 1950s where a lot of Bedford residents met their partners.

A regular band there was Lew Keay, the leading band of the time locally. The dance hall could hold 200 people and was also used for wedding receptions. It is now Lloyds Bank but I have been informed that the dance hall is still there but used as open-plan office space. There was also a banqueting room which could cater for up to 100 people.

The coffee bar like the dance hall was reached by some stairs to the right of the shop, this was a regular meeting place on a Saturday morning where husbands would meet their wives to help them carry the shopping home. In the 1950s not everyone had a car. It was also where any rugby players who were in town and looking for a game would be; a team secretary's delight.

Also there was a bakery to the rear of the premises where bread and confectionery were not only sold in the shops but deliveries were made to customers in Bedford.

The business was sold in 1976.



Façade of what used to be the Dujon Restaurant, Bedford 2011  
© SH

## Goldings

Ironmongers

80 High Street, Bedford and then moved to...

107 High Street, Bedford



© Elizabeth Mortimer, 2011

In 1867, William Day established the ironmongery business which later became Goldings. It continues to fascinate shoppers today with its amazing array of household goods of every category and description for sale. According to the Goldings website, it has always been a family run business that has prided itself on customer service and product knowledge in ironmongery. They claim to stock a wide range of products from hand, power and garden tools, electrical and lighting, pest control and fireworks to plumbing equipment. They also offer locksmith and key-cutting services.

The business was originally situated at 80 High Street, a shop occupied by Harrison and Simmonds since the early 1970s, after they moved there from 78 High Street. These are the only two Bedford High Street shops to remain open throughout the twentieth century and a full decade into the twenty-first century.

According to local historian, Richard Wildman, 107 High Street was occupied by Mrs Ellen Sim's wool and fancy warehouse in 1887. By 1894, Day & Son, ironmongers, had taken over and this became Golding & Grant soon after 1897 and William Golding Ironmonger after 1900. I discovered from a plan for alteration submitted, that in 1923, 107 High Street although occupied by Goldings, belonged to Messrs Higgins & Sons Ltd.

Around the turn of the twentieth century, the business was bought by Mr Rigby-Smith of Russell Avenue, Bedford, who sold it to Samuel Flower in 1919. However, Mr Flower was not blessed with good health and he could not rely on his staff for assistance with running the business and moving stock. Fortunately, in 1925, a commercial traveller knew that Ernest Lain, who was employed at Newman's ironmongers in Kingston-on-Thames and originated from Bedford wanted to move back there. Ernest, the middle one of five children, had been born to Albert and Annie Lain, when they lived in Hurst Grove. He started an apprenticeship at Randalls in St Mary's Street. When Randalls could not offer him permanent employment at the end of his apprenticeship in 1924, he moved to Kingston-on-Thames. He was earning £5 a week as a junior assistant at Newman's, which was an excellent wage in those days. When he wanted to return to Bedford the next year, the commercial traveller put him in contact with Mr Flower, who could only offer him £2.15s.0d (£2.75) a week. Even so, Ernest accepted the job, as it would cost him less to live at home.

According to an article in the "Rotary Club of Bedford 1975-76", in 1932, the business became a limited company, of which Mr Flower and Ernest Lain were the directors. Ernest Lain became the managing director on the death of Mr Flower in 1954. His son, Anthony (Tony), joined the firm as a full-time director on 1st January, 1976. The business expanded so much that the first floor needed to become a stock room. When Ernest Lain first joined the business, two tinsmiths and a plumber were employed, who made coal scuttles and other items by hand. By the mid-1970s, the shop was selling radio-controlling equipment for model boats and aeroplanes, "along with a host of other items reflecting modern life." By then, over 10,000 items were in stock, "catering for the many demands of its many customers." Over the decades, gas mantles were replaced by electric light bulbs and steel cutlery by stainless steel. Ernest Lain knew that people appreciated the personal touch in a shop and friendliness with the customers has always been a part of the shop's ethos. When the Rotary Club article was written, self-service and giant supermarkets already ruled the roost. Ernest Lain felt the Goldings approach was better for staff, as well as customers. Even then, it was unusual for the manager to have such close contact with all concerned. The shop celebrated its centenary in 1967 and its 125th anniversary in 1992. Even then, Ernest Lain was serving as Company Secretary at the age of 89, although he had been succeeded by his son, Tony, as manager.

I put out a brief questionnaire about Bedford High Street on paper and by email to people who were living in or near Bedford over forty years ago and received several memories about Goldings.

Linda Finning moved to Bedford from London in 1969 and remembers the wooden floor in Goldings and the things to buy that her mother would have used in her kitchen. The people who served her reminded her of her younger days when the workers would wear smocks. Also, Goldings would always close one day a week, which reminded her of earlier years of her life.

Sallie Saunders (née Blundell) wrote: "It was during the 1990s that I frequently shopped in Goldings, which seemed to stock every household item under the sun, including fly swatters. My youngest, born in 1984, and I went regularly to the back end of Goldings (a long, narrow shop) because there was an area dedicated to model aircrafts, boats, early motor cars, etc. of all sizes, plus the paints, glues, etc. needed to construct them. The sales assistants throughout the shop were endlessly helpful and unfailingly knowledgeable of exactly where to find anything required. It was the archetype of old-fashioned dedication to service to the customer during an era which had already moved on to fast service or self-service."

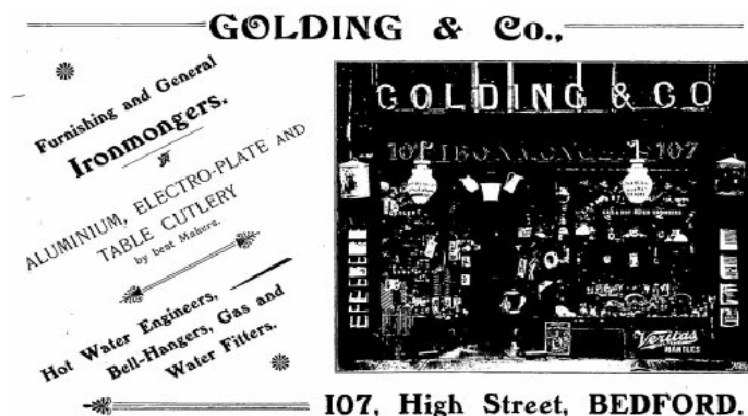
Mirabel Alison, who has lived in Bedford since 1964, recalls Goldings as "a comfortable helpful ironmongers that had everything for DIY and the kitchen – very good for toys, too." She particularly liked the expertise of the staff. "Before 1970, the shop seemed more in the centre of town. Now it is off the beaten track." Phil Bushell said of Goldings that, like hundreds of other children, he also was "a regular visitor there to buy especially balsa wood models – and pieces of balsa wood – and Airfix kits of planes and ships, along with the paints required." That would be in the early sixties for him.

Rona Rowlands is still using a set of Swan saucepans which she bought from Goldings, when she got married in 1950. Joyce Stanton (née Keeble) was born in 1920. She used to do all the household repairs and decorating. She said that the staff in Goldings were very obliging and would tell you how to do something and sell you the utensils, tools and spare parts, etc. without overcharging. They could always find what you needed; if it was not stocked, they knew where it was. She is still using a tea-caddy she bought there just after the War.

Anthony and Valerie Balfour went to Goldings when they lived in Bedford, for most of their hardware and cleaning items. Anthony remembers: "They had a large range of nails and screws in cardboard boxes, and were happy to sell small quantities, possibly by weight. I always enjoyed the lovely smell from the oiled wood floors and the owner who was always around the shop, assisting staff as well as customers. It was wonderful to have personal service from staff who knew what to recommend." Another memory is from a Bedfordian who remembers that Mr Lain, the owner, used to greet every customer at the door and that most of the staff were fairly elderly ladies and they seemed to stock everything!

Audrey Morris thinks of Goldings as "a treasure trove where you can buy just about everything." She hopes they continue to resist the temptation to 'upgrade'. It is about the only place she knows where you can buy single items like hooks instead of having to purchase a whole packet.

I can remember shopping at Goldings as a child with my parents in the 1950s. Ernest Lain was a personal acquaintance of my father, probably as a result of being served by him in the Midland Bank. We often went into the shop on a Saturday afternoon. Even today, I often shop in Goldings to purchase a wide variety of items. Vic Warner, the present manager, has worked at Goldings for over forty years, having originally been recruited as an apprentice. Goldings is unusual in that it is still closed every Thursday afternoon.



Advertisement from 'Mates Illustrated Guide to Bedford' 1906

## Harrison and Simmonds

### Tobacconist & Fancy Goods

78 High Street, Bedford and then moved to....

80 High Street, Bedford



© SH 2011

There had been a tobacconist shop, Covington's, at 78 High Street, Bedford, since at least 1884; but by 1918 the premises had been divided into two shops (No. 78 being the tobacconist's and 78a being the Carlton Shoe Company). By 1926 the tobacconist was William Percy Mayo. It was in May 1928 that he sold the business to Ernest Harrison and his nephew, Nathaniel Harrison Simmonds, both of whom had moved up from the West Country, and the family firm was established here. Over 80-odd years later, and five generations, it is still a family firm.

The shop used to open at 8am and did not close until 8pm, with the door open all day, every day, regardless of weather. Personal service was always the watch-word and a regular clientele was built up over the years, who would come in for their tobacco and cigars and everything to do with smoking: cigarettes, pipes, matches, lighters, cigarette boxes, ashtrays and tankards to hold cigars. Bedford being a popular county town retirement centre for numerous ex-military men and colonial administrators, 'Major' or 'Captain' so-and-so would come in, place their orders (either paying then or having the cost put on their account) and then leave, arranging to have their items delivered to their home, since "Gentlemen did not carry parcels". Posh cars would stop outside the shop. One member of the Russell family of Woburn Abbey, Lady Romula Russell, was a regular customer whenever she needed to buy birthday gift cigars for male members of her family. She always wore enormous hats on her visits to the shop.

Shop assistants served and blended tobaccos to suit customers' tastes and also weighed out snuff. They would know what regular customers liked, and knew each customer's profession, business or trade (and would recommend them to others). Many customers used the shop for decades. Assistants had always to greet customers with a smile and "Good morning, sir (or 'madam', although it was very much a "man's shop"), always had to look as though they were doing something and never sit down.

The firm began to specialise in producing its own 'in-house' tobacco brands for pipe smokers, such as 'Major's Mixture' or a range which they named after characters in Dickens's novels, such as 'Oliver Twist' and 'Scrooge'.

The family took great pride in the quality of their window displays and changed them frequently. Over the decades they won prizes for their displays of goods.

During the Second World War, regular customers were given priority for 'under-the-counter items' not displayed to the public, to retain loyal patrons, but often they just ran out of tobacco and had to close the shop until new stocks arrived. Families would place orders for absent members of the family, away at war, and the firm would send tobacco products abroad to them. The firm had the opportunity, at this time, to buy the premises and the bank agreed a loan but they decided not to take the risk, given the possibility of the shop's destruction by enemy bombers.

Post-war, the firm extended its range to include Parker pens and Remington electric razors and became local agents for Ronson and Colibri. Nathaniel Simmonds would meet up with other High Street shop managers for coffee each weekday morning at 10.30am at the Cadena cafe, at the entrance to the Arcade.

Before the Second World War, smoking was a fashionable thing to do but from the 1960s onwards, as concerns regarding the ill-effects of smoking on health began to impact on sales, and as the new supermarkets took a lot of the trade from independent tobacconists, the family decided to diversify further. Harrison & Simmonds began selling walking sticks, leather goods, globes, barometers, detailed scale models of cars and aeroplanes. They invested in a computerised engraving machine, since they had always done engraving for presentation items. They began selling goods on the Internet as well as through mail order. The family are committed Roman Catholics, and so began selling religious items such as crucifixes and rosaries.

These days they feel that they are now one of a dying breed of specialist shops where personal service is still given and staff know about what they are selling. In 1971 the lease on No. 78 (with 78a) ran out and the firm moved its shop a few yards up the road to larger, deeper premises at No. 80 High Street and took with them the old-fashioned counter and shop fittings which are still on show at the back of the shop, today. It is well worth a visit to give one a sense of what shops were like earlier in the twentieth century.

# Hockliffes

## Booksellers

78 High Street, Bedford and then moved to ...  
86 & 88 High Street, Bedford



86 & 88 High Street, Bedford, 2011  
© SH

### The Hockliffe Family

Frederic Hockliffe was born on 6<sup>th</sup> September 1833 and died on 13<sup>th</sup> February 1914. He married Jane Elizabeth Rich. He was born in Bedford and educated at the Modern School. He trained as a printer with Forman and Lawrence before leaving Bedford to train as a printer with Austin & Sons in Hertford. He then worked for Simpkin Marshall in London before returning to Bedford and establishing his own business, founding Hockliffe's booksellers in about 1870. He bought the second hand book business of Mr Rolls in the 1870s. He was a connoisseur and keen collector of books, prints, historic documents, antique furniture and china and also had a collection of children's books and straw-work made by French prisoners in the Napoleonic Wars. Eventually retiring to Pavenham, he died of heart failure on a visit to his son Ernest who was a master at Uppingham School. He was buried in Bedford Cemetery following a service in the chapel.

Frederic Richard Hockliffe, his son, was born in 1861 and died in 1929. His wife, Elizabeth, died in 1937. A keen cricketer in his youth, he was a JP and was connected with the Reform Party movement of 1901. He was elected to the Town Council in 1903 and served as Mayor in 1915, 1916 and 1918. In 1919 he became the first president of the newly founded Chamber of Trade and became an alderman in 1919. He was chairman of the Bedford War Tribunal and a member of the Bedford Club and also of the Bedford Arts Club of which he was president in 1914. He was also a governor of the Harpur Trust. He and his wife lived for many years at 64 Goldington Avenue before moving in 1916 to 27 Bushmead Avenue. He latterly retired to Pavenham, where his wife remained after his death. His funeral took place in St Paul's Church before the coffin was taken to Golders Green for cremation. The ashes were scattered on the grave of his parents at Bedford Cemetery. Business was suspended in the High Street as a mark of respect and the Borough flag flew at half mast over the Town Hall.

Elizabeth Hockliffe, his widow, was known for her war work during the First World War. She took an active interest in the business after her son Maurice left to work in London in 1935.

Maurice Frederic Richard Hockliffe (son of the younger Frederic) was born in 1900 and died in 1989. He attended Bedford School from 1910 -1918, eventually becoming head boy. He passed an entrance examination into the Royal Navy and served as a cadet at Keyham but afterwards went into the Forest Service abroad and was stationed in Kenya for some time. After his father's death, he returned to Bedford to manage the business but left again in 1935 to take up a post as librarian in London. He was a fine amateur actor and a member of Bedford Dramatic Club.



Hockliffe gravestone in Foster Hill Road Cemetery, Bedford  
© SH 2011

### Timeline for Hockliffe's Bookshop

- 1870 Frederic Hockliffe - High Street premises (subsequently Sell and Willshaw's)
- 1870 64 Loyes Street, Bedford
- 1871 32 St Loyes Street, Bedford
- 1878 78 High Street, Bedford
- c.1885 86 & 88 High Street, Bedford
- 1914 Death of Frederic Hockliffe. Business continued by his son Frederic R. Hockliffe
- 1929 Death of Frederic R. Hockliffe
- 1929-1935 Business managed by Maurice Hockliffe, Frederic's son. Second hand bookshop at 78 Lime Street, Bedford until 1965
- Late 1930s Business sold to W H Smith, but continued to trade under the Hockliffe name.

The Hockliffe Collection of early Children's Books is housed at the University of Bedfordshire.

### Timeline for Nos 86-88 High Street, Bedford

- 18thc Shop with bakery and yard at rear
- 1840s 88 High Street acquired by Mary and William Pearson from the Malden family, at one time millers at Duck Mill
- 1870 J E Liller, printer (No. 86) and Mary Pearson, Baker (No. 88)
- c.1880c Holmes & Co, Fancy Goods and toys (No. 86) and Malden's Baker (No. 88)
- 1883-5 Rebuilt for Hockliffe, Bookseller, designed by Henry Young in the Queen Anne style. Mixed residential and commercial use (the family lived there for a time)
- Late 1930s Taken over by WH Smith but traded under Hockliffe name until 1973
- 1975 WH Smith
- 1982 Central Chambers Woodfine & Co. Solicitors
- 1986 Park Woodfine, Solicitors
- 1990 The Yorkshire Bank
- 2011 The Jeweller's Bench and The Skills Bank



86 & 88 High Street, Bedford  
© Historic Environment Record, Bedford Borough Council

## The International Stores

Grocers

121 High Street, Bedford

### *Memories of working at the International Stores in the 1960s*

Susan Rabbit has lived for all but four of her sixty-three years in York Street. She went to work at the International Stores after she left school. Having seen the job advertised in the local paper, she was interviewed by the Assistant Manager, Mr Ian Stanton. Susan started working there some time in August, 1962. The International Stores shop was situated at the top of the High Street, near to the corner of St Peter's Street. According to Kelly's directories, the shop at 121 High Street started trading under that name between 1914 and 1920. Prior to that, it was known as Bedford Supply Stores or Atkins & Smith.

In 1962, the Manager was Mr Tim Goodship, the brother of Peter Goodship, whom Susan and I knew at Russell Park Baptist Church. Susan worked with a lot of other people, including Miss Wagstaff, Mr Dicks, Miss Brooks, Miss Bowler, Mrs Warner, Mr Brown, Mr Burke, Mr Golder, Mr Ian Hedley, Mr Breen and Miss Daniels, amongst others. Two things that strike me from this list are the fact that everyone was referred to in a formal manner, rather than by their first name, which is the norm today, and the large number of staff that there were to lavish personal attention on the customers as they served them.



Susan Rabbit  
© Susan Rabbit 2011

Susan's job was to make up the orders and to serve on the cooked meat and cheese counter. She also made the tea and washed the floor late at night. She feels it was a good place to work, although it was hard work. She earned £3 12s 6d a week, which is £3.62½ in today's money.

There was a wine counter on the left hand side of the shop and the tills were in the middle. Also on the left hand side was the vegetable and fruit selection. On the right hand side was the cooked meat and cheese counter and the cold selection (butter and margarine, etc.). There were shelves round the shop and in the middle. Out the back were the storage place, the small office, walk-in fridges and the place where she made up the orders. Also, there were stairs leading to a storage space upstairs. There were toilets, etc. and a lift. Out the back, there was another storage space, called the Tabernacle, and this was where the van was kept. The van was driven by Norman and later by Miss Daniels.

Susan finished working at the International Stores in May, 1970. The shop closed at the beginning of the 1980s and was taken over by the Showboat Amusement Arcade. More recently, it has become the Reels Amusement Centre.



International Stores c 1968  
© Historic Environment Record, Bedford Borough Council



Exterior of Reels previously site of the International Stores, 2011  
© Elizabeth Mortimer

## Laxtons

Seedsmen, Nurserymen & Florists

63a High Street, Bedford



63a High Street Bedford c.1955  
Source Bedfordshire & Luton Archives & Records Service (BLARS)

### The Laxton Family

#### What made the Laxtons so special?

Thomas was one of the earliest nurserymen to use scientific methods in plant breeding. He selected parent plants from close observations of their most desirable characteristics rather than simply from well-known varieties as was common at that time. Thomas Laxton's trials and observations aided the work of Charles Darwin and were referred to in Darwin's published works. Thomas Laxton's aim was to improve the quality of plants, rather than make money and he believed that seed from all commercially produced plants should be saved. Three generations of the Laxton family and over 100 years of horticultural work raised at least 182 new varieties of plants.

#### Thomas Laxton (1830 - 1893)

- born in Tinwell, Rutland, became a solicitor
- developed an interest in the hybridization of plants
- by 1858 - started plant breeding
- 1872 - began introducing strawberry varieties from his work
- by 1879 - moved to Bedford
- 1885 - earliest known entry for him in Kelly's Directory as "seed grower and merchant", listed at 1 Harpur Place, Bedford (now 41 Harpur St, Bedford)
- 1890 - in retirement at 78 Tavistock Street, Bedford
- twice married; 3 daughters by first wife, 4 sons by second wife

#### William Hudson Laxton (1866 - 1923)

Son of Thomas Laxton

- 1888 - formed a partnership with brother Edward
- joint owner of brickworks in Kempston Hardwick
- 1923 - died at 28 The Embankment, Bedford

#### Edward Augustine Lowe Laxton (1868 - 1951)

Son of Thomas Laxton and the driving force behind the nursery

- 1888 - went into partnership with brother William to form "Laxton Bros."
- 1890 - Laxton Bros. were at 4-6 Bromham Rd and opened a shop at 63a High Street, Bedford
- 1951 - MBE in New Year Honours. Died at 73 Bushmead Avenue, Bedford in the same year

The brothers concentrated their attention on crossing the best varieties of apples, pears, plums and small fruits. Lord Lambourne, a dessert apple, raised by Laxton Bros in 1907 was awarded the RHS Bunyard Cup in 1921 and an award of merit in 1925.

c.1900 set up Tollgate Nurseries (140 acres) at Goldington Road, opposite Newnham Avenue (where the University of Bedfordshire is now).

## Edward William Henry Laxton (1894 - 1942)

Son of Edward A.L. Laxton

- known as Ted
- Inherited horticultural talents and enthusiasm of his father
- 1923 - became partner in nursery business shortly before his Uncle William died
- 1942 - killed in air raid by direct hit on his home at 176 Kimbolton Road, Bedford

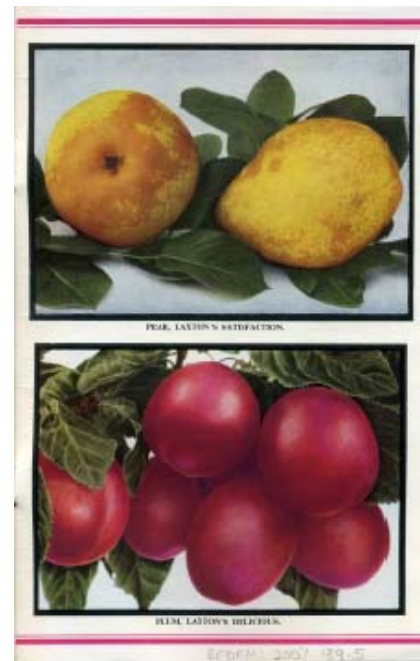
He was involved in the production of new varieties of fruits, roses and garden peas

## John Edward Laxton (1925 – 2011)

- 1951 - became head of the firm
- 1956 - sold all the land belonging to the firm
- 1957 - sold the nursery & shop, the nursery land was "overworked" and went into voluntary liquidation

## Timeline for 63a High Street, Bedford

- 1860s - private house
- 1868 - James Corcoran, Distiller
- 1884 - Edward Verdon Corcoran, Wine Merchant
- 1890 - No.63 Edw. de V Corcoran, Wine Merchant  
No.63a Laxton brothers William and Edward opened a shop and sold seeds
- 1893 - No.63 Edw. de V Corcoran, Wine Merchant  
No.63a Laxton Bros., Florists
- 1895 - No.63 P. Phipps & Co., Wine Merchants  
No.63a Laxton Bros., Florists
- 1903 - No.63 P. Phipps and Co. Ltd., Brewers  
No.63a Laxton Bros., Florists
- 1938 - No.63 Mrs L. Monger, Baby Linen  
No.63a Laxton Bros. Bedford Ltd., Florists
- 1955 - No.63 The Baby Shop  
No.63a Laxtons
- 1959 - Nos.63 & 63a Currys Ltd., Cycle Dealers
- 1986 - Nos.63 & 63a Currys
- c. 2009 Tesco's Store



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## Laxton Bros., Bedford Ltd. Seedsmen, Nurserymen & Florists Shop at 63a High Street, Bedford



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## Laxton Catalogues at Bedford Museum

The local firm Laxtons produced catalogues each year, with different titles to promote the products they wished to sell, eg 'Rose Trees', 'Vegetable and Flower Seeds', 'Fruit Trees, Small Fruits and Shrubs' and 'Vegetable Seeds'.

Some included prices for garden tools, potting compost, manure, insecticides, fumigants, weed killer, bulbs and garden ornaments.

The collection of catalogues in **The Bedford Museum** covers the years from 1935 – 1949, (which includes World War 2).

## The War had several effects on the production of the catalogues

- 1936 'Rose Trees' had photographs of red roses on front and back cover – 'Mrs Edward Laxton' on the front and 'Bedford Crimson' on the back.
- 1937 'Vegetable and Flower Seed' had a coloured photograph of single chrysanthemums on the cover. It had 40 pages and many black and white photographs inside. On the inside cover was a self promotion article thanking customers for their support and explaining how very good their products were.
- 1942 'Vegetable and Flower Seed' had a designed cover in black, white and one colour and only one black and white photograph inside. There were only 32 pages of much poorer quality paper.
- 1945 'Fruit Trees, Small Fruits and Shrubs', 8 pages.
- 1945 'Vegetable Seeds', 17 pages. Both these catalogues had a designed cover and very poor quality paper.
- 1948 'Vegetable and Flower Seed' had a designed cover in red, black and white with 28 pages, no photographs and poor quality paper.
- 1949 'Fruit Trees, Small Fruits and Roses' had coloured photographs on the inside and outside of the front and back cover. These are the names –
  1. 'Laxton Victory' Apple
  2. 'Poinsettia' Red Rose
  3. 'Laxton Satisfaction' Pear (½ page)
  4. 'Laxton Delicious' Plum (½ page)
  5. 'Bedford Giant' Blackberry

The paper was glossy and good quality. Inside, several black and white photographs had appeared again.

## Catalogue contents

These Laxton Catalogues show the huge number of vegetable and flower seeds with many, many varieties. The same goes for the fruit trees, small fruit and shrubs, and roses.

During the War Laxtons indicated to their customers that there were some shortages but post-war things got much easier.

1937 'Vegetable and Flower Seed' had a Tool Section of about 45 items all priced.

1945 'Vegetable and Flower Seed'. The Tool Section could only offer "prices on application" for most items.

1945 'Vegetable and Flower Seed'. On page 1, customers are advised that there is a shortage of fruit trees.

1949 'Fruit Trees, Small Fruits and Roses'. There is an article called 'New Fruits 1949' about their healthy new stock of many new varieties of fruit trees which were "highly recommended by the national trials of the Royal Horticultural Society at Wisley".

## Increases in prices

|                               | 1937               | 1942          | 1949                |
|-------------------------------|--------------------|---------------|---------------------|
| Runner beans<br>'Laxton Czar' | 1/6 per pint       | 2/6 per pint  | 4/- per pint        |
| Onion seeds<br>'Sandy Prize'  | 1/6 per ounce      | 3/- per ounce | 3/6 per ounce       |
| Hybrid Tea Roses              | 1/3 each           |               | 4/- each            |
| Flower Seeds (general)        | 3d / 6d per packet |               | 6d / 1/- per packet |

## A general list of bushes (10/6) & half standard apple trees (14/-) from Laxton's Catalogue 1949, showing the wide variety available after the Second World War

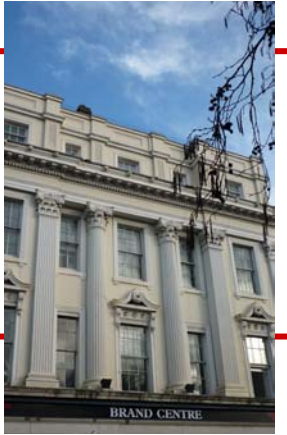
|                      |                         |                           |
|----------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|
| Allington Pippin     | Irish Peach             | St Edmond's Russet        |
| Annie Elizabeth      | James Grieve            | Stirling Castle           |
| Arthur Turner        | King Edward VII         | Sturmer Pippin            |
| Beauty of Bath       | King of Pippins         | Tydemans' Early Worcester |
| Beauty of Kent       | King of Tompkins County | Wagener                   |
| Belle de Boskoop     | Lady Sudeley            | Warner's King             |
| Bismarck             | Lane's Prince Albert    | William Crump             |
| Blenheim Pippin      | Lord Derby              | Worcester Pearmain        |
| Bramley's Seedling   | Lord Grosvenor          | Wyken Pippin              |
| Brownlees' Russet    | Lord Suffield           |                           |
| Charles Ross         | Miller's Seedling       |                           |
| Claygate Pearmain    | Monarch                 |                           |
| Coronation           | Mother                  |                           |
| Cox's Orange Pippin  | Newton Wonder           |                           |
| Crawley Beauty       | Normanton Wonder        |                           |
| Crimson Bramley      | Orleans Reinette        |                           |
| Crimson Cox's Orange | Peasgood's Nonsuch      |                           |
| Early Victoria       | Rev Wilks               |                           |
| Egremont Russet      | Ribston Pippin          |                           |
| Ellison's Orange     | Rival                   |                           |
| Gasgoyne's Scarlet   | Rosemary Russet         |                           |
| Golden Spire         | Royal Jubilee           |                           |
| Grenadier            | St Cecilia              |                           |



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## Palgraves

Druggists and Chemists  
19-21 High Street, Bedford



19 - 21 High Street Bedford 2011  
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## The Palgrave Family

### Robert Palgrave

Standing surety for yeoman, Joseph Hoason, in 1799, he is described as a 'druggist from Bedford'. In 1820, he is listed as a freeholder in the parish of St Paul's, Bedford and by 1832, according to the elector's list of that year he had a property at Palgrave Row.

### John Pierson Palgrave 1795-1840

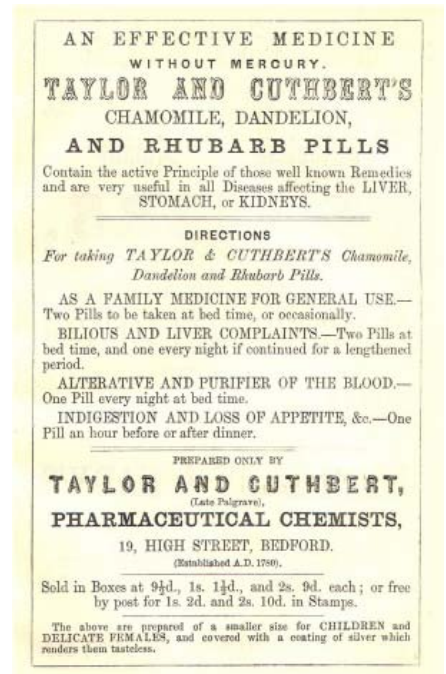
Thought to be the son of Robert Palgrave above. Pigot & Co.'s National Commercial Directory, 1830, lists John and Chas. Palgrave, High Street, Bedford as 'Chymists and Druggists'. In the 1832 elector's list, he is shown as having a freehold property at Gravel Lane, Bedford.

### Charles Frederick Palgrave 1797-1854

Thought to be the son of Robert Palgrave above. In business with his brother as a 'Chymist and Druggist' according to Pigot's Directory, 1830. Charles Palgrave was Mayor of Bedford in 1849 and 1850. His architect nephew Robert Palgrave (1831-1882) designed an imposing chemist's shop and living quarters for him at 19-21 High Street in c. 1849. His nephew was a pupil of George Gilbert Scott and also designed Howard's Britannia Works in 1857 and St Paul's tower and spire in Bedford. The business was sold to John Usher Taylor, Chemist after Charles Palgrave's death in 1854.

## Timeline for Nos. 19-21 High Street, Bedford

|               |  |
|---------------|--|
| c 1800        | Palgraves, Chemists established at this site                       |
| 1849-51       | Chemist's shop and residential quarters built for Charles Palgrave |
| 1854          | John Usher Taylor, Chemist   |
| 1858          | Taylor & Cuthbert, Chemists  |
| 1890          | No.19 Taylor & Cuthbert, Pharmaceutical Chemists                   |
|               | No.21 Harry Whittome, Clothier                                     |
| 1898          | No.19 Taylor and Cuthbert, Chemists                                |
|               | No.19 Slipper, Shipley, Dentists                                   |
|               | No.21 Bedford Clothing Co.   |
| 1899          | No.19 vacant   |
|               | No.21 Bedford Clothing Co.   |
| 1903          | No.19 Theed Pearse, Solicitor                                      |
|               | No.19 Upson & Co. Bootmakers                                       |
|               | No.21 Bedford Clothing Co.   |
| 1912          | No.19 Upson & Co. Boot & Shoe Stores                               |
|               | No. 21 Charnley & Sons, Opticians                                  |
| c1915         | No. 19 Capital & Counties Bank (later Lloyds Bank)                 |
|               | No. 21 Charnley & Sons, Opticians                                  |
| 1938          | No.19 Lloyds Bank  |
|               | No.21 Charnley & Sons, Opticians                                   |
| 1947          | No.19 Lloyds Bank  |
|               | No.21 Charnley & Sons, Opticians                                   |
| 1952          | Nos.19 and 21 Lloyds Bank  |
| Up to 1970s   | Lloyds Bank  |
| 1970s onwards | Various bars and clubs   |



Advertisement from 1868 Bedford Directory for Taylor & Cuthbert (late Palgrave)

## C.F. Timeaus

Printer, Stationer, Bookseller and Newsagent

90 High Street, Bedford



From 'Where to Buy at Bedford' 1891

The Timeaus family came to Bedford in 1780 from the central European state of Moravia. John Timeaus was a master baker and his family were staunch members of the Moravian church.

One of their sons, who was educated at Bedford School, was Charles Frederick who decided not to go into the family business and was apprenticed to a printer in Newport Pagnell. He was the grandson of a bishop and secretary of The Oddfellows. Until his nephew joined the business, he lived on the premises on the High Street, then moved to a house in the Kimbolton Road where he lived until he died in 1875.

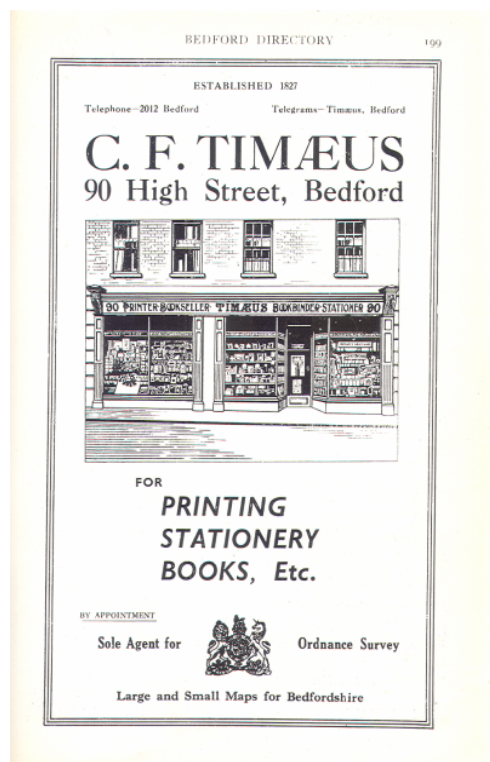
The business started off in premises on the corner of Dame Alice Street and the High Street in 1827 and when an old wine merchant's shop became available it moved to the corner of Lime Street and High Street in 1829. The shop at the front of the building was a booksellers, stationers and newsagents but a large room at the back of the premises, which had a two foot thick wall and had been a wine cellar, was converted into a printer's workshop. Timeaus published the Bedfordshire Times from 1847.

When Charles passed away in 1875, his nephew Alfred Edward who had trained as a printer at Dodd and Peeling of Woburn where he got a sound knowledge of the business, took over the firm. Alfred was a good cricket player and once played for a Northamptonshire side against an All England side. He died in 1895. The business was then run by his son Charles Edward Timeaus until his death in 1930.

In the early 1900s, Timeaus employed 16 printers who would turn up to work in a suit and change into white aprons. They would start work at eight o'clock in the morning and finish at seven o'clock in the evening. On Saturdays it was a half-day when they would finish at four o'clock. On every one of the staff's birthdays, at eleven o'clock, there would be a celebration where drinks and food were handed around and they had a sing-song. Charles Edward Timeaus nearly always joined in the celebration.

In 1946 I did a paper round for the shop; I delivered 20 papers in the Shakespeare Road area, six days a week for the princely sum of four shillings a week (20p in today's money).

The business closed in 1952 after 123 years of trading.



Advertisement from the 1939 Bedford Directory

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*You may also like to visit the Bedfordshire and Luton Archives and Records Service (BLARS) to find out more about the history of shops in Bedford.*

It has a vast collection of items which includes books, Bedford and Bedfordshire directories, local newspapers and magazines, census returns, maps, illustrations (including photographs), local government records, building plans, auction sale catalogues and documents from local companies and trades including, bill heads, deeds, leases and transactions.

Contact details are on the Further Information page.



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# Acknowledgements

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Sally Heard  
Hilary McDonald  
Barry Stephenson

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# Further information

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You can find more information about the history of Bedford High Street from:

## Bedford Central Library

Harpur Street  
Bedford MK40 1PG  
Tel : 01234 718178

and in the **Local & Family History part of the Virtual Library**  
[www.bedford.gov.uk](http://www.bedford.gov.uk) click on Libraries, click on Local & Family History

## Bedfordshire & Luton Archives & Records Service (BLARS)

Riverside Building  
Borough Hall  
Cauldwell Street  
Bedford MK42 9AP  
Tel : 01234 228833  
[www.bedford.gov.uk](http://www.bedford.gov.uk) click on Archives and Records

## Bedford Museum

The museum is closed for refurbishment until late 2012 but see  
[www.bedfordmuseum.org](http://www.bedfordmuseum.org)

## The Historic Environment Record (HER)

Telephone, e-mail, send a letter or visit in person (appointment only)  
Town Hall  
St Pauls' Square  
Bedford MK40 1SJ  
Tel : 01234 227194 or 012343 221817  
E-Mail : [archaeology@bedford.gov.uk](mailto:archaeology@bedford.gov.uk)  
[www.heritagegateway.org.uk/gateway/chr](http://www.heritagegateway.org.uk/gateway/chr) and select Bedford Borough HER