

A POTTED HISTORY OF T BAKER, WOODFORD

by D A V Baker

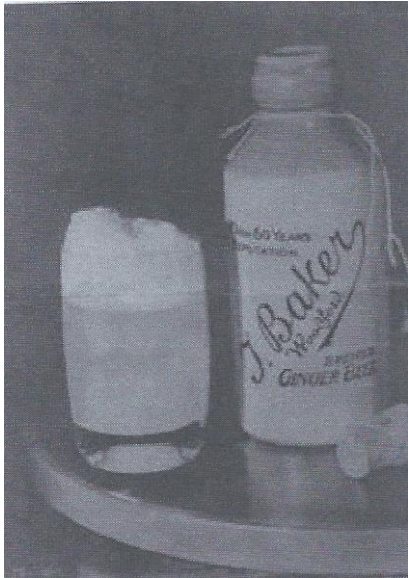
On 3 January 1875 a young (24 year old) woman called Anne Stace from Providence Row in Leytonstone married a cowman called Tom Baker (aged 29) from Quafen Fen, Soham in Cambridgeshire. As her wedding present from her father she was given his secret recipe for ginger beer. She had been in service as a maid at Highams - 'the big house' in Woodford Green (later to become Woodford County High School for Girls) and as her leaving present was given a permanent order to supply them with ginger beer. The couple moved into a two up two down cottage in Grove End, South Woodford and so began the family business of T Baker, Woodford.

They began a family of seven all of whom, as youngsters, would have had to help with the family business when they weren't attending Churchfields School or walking to and from it! As they grew up and left home to pursue their own way in life, only the fifth child, Arthur (born 11 January 1888) and the seventh, Grace remained at home. Tom Baker died in 1915 (aged 70) and his wife, Anne Baker, died in 1922 (aged 71) leaving Arthur and Grace to continue. Grace eventually married and emigrated to Canada leaving Arthur to run the business alone.

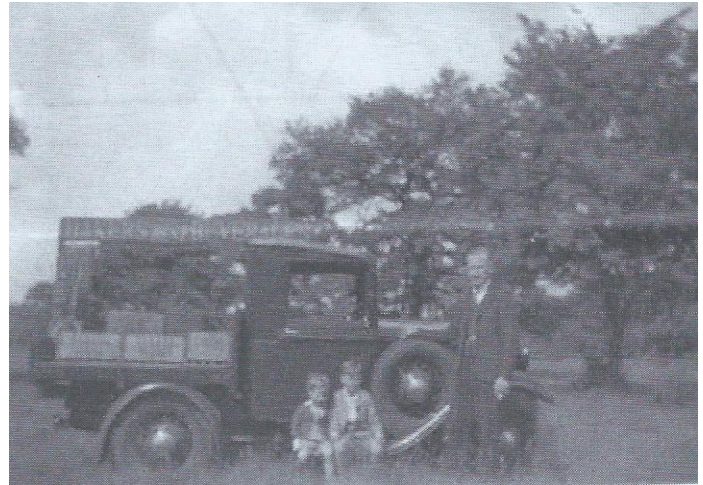
In January 1939 Arthur finally married. His wife was Mabel Vince (from Walpole Road in Woodford) the manageress of the United Dairies shop in Radley Lane. They had two sons, David (the author of this article) and Richard who also had to help with the business (when they weren't at Churchfields or walking to and from it!) The business had expanded from the original ginger beer to include, amongst others, lemonade, limeade, cherryade, ice cream soda, cola, tonic water and ginger ale as well as squashes and cordials. It was supplying many local businesses as well as tea huts in the Forest such as Robinson's opposite the Rising Sun in Woodford New Road. Customers included:

- The Comrades Victory Club (in Woodford Bridge on the site of what is now Hylands)
- The Village Rest Cafe (still extant in Woodford Bridge)
- The 54th Club, Salway Hill
- Pickerings and Co (George Lane)
- The Pansy Tea Rooms (at the Napier Arms)
- W and C French (their canteen at Buckhurst Hill)
- Frederick Gorringer Ltd (Forest School Tuck Shop)
- The George
- The Cricketers

Before the 1930s the old fashioned method of bottling ginger beer (in stone bottles corked and tied down with string) began to be superseded when screw topped stone ginger beer bottles were introduced. There was still a market for the cork and string type right up until the late 1950s, notably with the Forest School Tuck Shop. (Presumably the boys preferred shaking the bottle before cutting the string with its consequences - suggestive of champagne!) However, as the old (non-screw-topped) bottles were taken out of use, many were set head down in the ground so that they formed a hard stand for crates in the storage sheds at Grove End.



Stone ginger beer bottle



Arthur Baker with his delivery van

After the death of Arthur Baker in 1956, although Mabel tried to continue the business for a short while, it was becoming non-viable in the face of competition from the likes of R White, Schweppes, Corona etc., and was sold in 1957. Although the business went the cottage and outbuildings remained until the site was demolished, along with the rest of Grove End (apart from numbers 2 and 4) to make way for the widened (and deepened) A406.