

Shopping in Woodford Green - 1960s Style

By Nigel Pitt

Shopping in the early 1960s was very different from today. For a start there were no big supermarkets and homes would be lucky to have a small fridge let alone a freezer. So shopping was a daily event for many 'housewives' and queuing was also accepted as the norm.

Woodford Broadway had a good choice of food shops but it was necessary to visit several to get everything for a meal.

By far the biggest was Sainsbury's (No. 32). This was one of the early J. Sainsbury counter-service shops, opened in 1907 and it survived intact with its original shop front and Edwardian tiled walls until 1974. Two long marble-topped counters ran down either side of the shop and there were separate counters for fresh meat, poultry, cooked meats, dairy, (butter was patted and wrapped on the counter), groceries, biscuits. Each with its own queue, sometimes the queues were long and overlapped down the centre aisle. People came from far and wide to shop at Sainsburys, such was their reputation. When Sainsburys opened the supermarket in Debden in the late 60s it certainly affected the Broadway shops. The shop had been extended to its full extent and went as far as the service road, the warehouse being on the opposite side of the road. Originally the staff would have lived in a hostel over the premises.

Other grocers were United Dairies (No. 5) and Mumfords (No. 26). Both were counter-service. The 'UD' or simply 'the dairy' as it was often known, had a white marble L shaped counter and the assistants rushed around collecting the various items from the shelves behind. The bill was added up in pencil on the paper bag (no calculators then!) and just the total was entered on the old fashioned mechanical cash register. This was common practice in those days, electronic cash registers and computers were still many years away. Later the shop was extended back to the service road and converted to self-service. Not long afterwards, Unigate sold the shop and it became Jay-Jay Stores.

Mumfords was an up market grocer and there was a wonderful smell of coffee roasting as one entered, mingled with the smell from the bacon slicer. As was common in many shops, a bentwood chair was provided for the tired shopper to rest while her order was being prepared. There were big square tins of biscuits displayed on a rack at the rear of the shop, sold loose, not in packets. As a child, I remember being sent to either here or Sainsbury's to buy broken biscuits, my mother not wishing to be seen buying them! The broken biscuits had the added excitement of the possibility of chocolate or cream-filled varieties, as opposed to the plain digestives, Lincoln or Rich Tea that we normally had to make do with at home. When Mumfords closed around 1970 I watched the shop being sadly stripped of its beautiful Edwardian shelves and counters.

There was a butcher, Lidstones (No. 11), Broadway Fisheries (No. 27) and Godlonton's greengrocer (No. 29). The greengrocer was Heyward Brothers until the Godlontons

acquired it in 1959. This was a very busy shop and again queuing was involved, once for the vegetables which were at the back of the shop and then again for the fruit and salad which was beautifully displayed on a counter at the front and to the left hand side. There was no shop front, just a shutter. There was no self-service in those days and one took a shopping bag or basket for the shopping, carrier bags were brown kraft paper with string handles and had to be paid for! So the first thing into the basket would be the potatoes (tipped in from the scales) followed by the heavy veg, with salad and fruit on top. The fruit counter was usually manned by Mrs. G (as my mother called her) and of course one just asked for the items and accepted them already wrapped in a paper bag. There was no selection by the customer then. It was a brave person who returned to complain about any merchandise! Mrs. G was always immaculately made up, wore fluffy mules and sported a fur collar in the winter!

The fishmonger's was also open fronted with a large cold slab running from front to back. Poultry and game was hung at the front of the shop. 'Harry The Fish' ran the shop.

Many shops provided a delivery service and one could either place the order in the shop or telephone it. My grandmother had her groceries delivered by Mumfords. Daily fresh bread was delivered by a baker and both the butcher and fishmonger delivered orders.

As children we were spoilt for sweet shops. The best was Vales (No. 8). The original shopfront is still intact, the name 'Chas W. Vale' used to be in the panel below the glass. Later this was taken over by Frank Moore, [whose son Brian acquired Broadway Music & Vision (then at No. 4) in around 1969]. This had a tobacconist counter on the left and a counter at the rear of the shop with rows of sweet jars on shelves. All sweets being sold loose and weighed out into small white paper bags. On the right hand wall were displayed Fullers Cakes in their white and red boxes. These were only purchased for very special occasions. The walnut one was the most famous, three layers of sponge with walnut buttercream filling, covered in thick white frosted icing with walnuts round the edge. I also liked the chocolate cake with its thick dark chocolate icing.

There was also a small sweet shop at the far end (No. 23a) and by the station subway was the cheaper option presided over by Mrs. Bennie. This sold the low-priced sweets - sherbert fountains, sherbert dabs, flying saucers, loose liquorice, farthing chews - 'Blackjacks' or 'Fruit Salad' and 'Jamboree Bags' which contained candy sweets and some plastic toy or similar. The sweets in the bags were not very nice! We came here when our pocket money was running short! Also on sale here were cheap toys. Everything was in glass cases on the counter and had to be asked for. Mrs. Bennie was never that friendly to us and shuffled around behind the counter, chivvying us up if we did not make up our minds very quickly! Not something that children tend to do in sweet shops!

At No. 1 the name over the shop was S.A. Brine but it was known to us merely as "The Paper Shop". Not only did they sell newspapers and magazines but also stationery. At Christmas we would buy the gummed paper strips to make up into garlands to decorate the

living room. In November this was the place for fireworks; penny bangers and 'jumping jacks' were favourites with us - enough said!

Stationery and greetings cards were also sold at Baggotts Book Shop (No. 9) which also housed the Post Office counter at the far end of the shop. Gwen was the Sub Postmistress for many years. The queue for the Post Office could stretch the length of the shop on pension day! There was also a telephone kiosk in the shop, which my mother had to use when we first moved to our new house in 1957 as there was a long wait for a telephone in those days. Baggotts not only sold books but ran a lending library as well. They also sold Dinky Toys and Hornby trains which were displayed in glass showcases on the left hand wall.

Woodford was well supplied with dry cleaners, Achille Serre (later Sketchley) at No. 10 and two over the railway and two more on the High Road. There was a strong smell of dry cleaning fluid in Achille Serre's and one wonders now what the assistants were breathing in all day.

A.E. Pope (No. 28) the ironmonger (later Gray Brothers) was an 'Aladdin's cave'. The stock reached from floor to ceiling and there were two high counters both with shelves above them to provide even more storage. The far counter sold nails and screws (sold loose and weighed out), decorating supplies and tools. At this counter also I would be sent with an old lemonade bottle to get it filled with white spirit or metholated spirit if mother was decorating. Certainly would not be allowed today! They sold paraffin too. At the left hand counter they sold general hardware goods – polish, dusters, cleaning materials etc. They would wrap goods in brown paper parcels tied up with string. The paper was torn from a huge roll at the end of the counter and the string was pulled from a dispenser high up on the wall. Also on sale were shopping trolleys - not the square tartan ones seen today, these were handcrafted wicker baskets with a wooden walking stick as a handle. To differentiate one's own trolley, plastic covers in different patterns could also be purchased from Popes. These trolleys were very popular with Woodford ladies and could be seen lined up outside the shops awaiting their owners return. Popes had a second shop at 34 which sold wallpaper and paint. When the fishmonger closed, Gray Brothers expanded next door and the two shops connected. For some long time afterwards the smell of fish, which must have permeated the brickwork, could be smelt in the shop!

Before The Broadway was built there were shops at the High Road and some in Lower Snakes Lane but with the building of the Monkams Estate, obviously there was need for local shops. The original parades date from just after 1900, the west side finished at Chrystalls Chemists, one of the original shops still trading today complete with its wonderful Edwardian shopfront. The east side finished at No. 26 (Mumfords).

Many of the shops in the 1960s were original from when the parades were built. One such was R.W. & I. Puddicombe Ltd., drapers. This occupied the largest site 30, 31 and 31a. They were originally based in Leytonstone but moved to Woodford in 1903 when The Broadway was built. Presumably they saw the owners of the new houses as their target customers.

Apart from their furriers shop, they closed the Leytonstone branch. Here too, the staff in the early days lived 'above the shop'. It was quite common practice for large shops to provide staff accommodation in those days. They sold ladies clothes, fabrics and had a large haberdashery department. When a purchase was made, the money was placed in the Lamson pneumatic tube which propelled it to the 'counting house' where the change and receipt were quickly returned to the shop floor. It had a large arcaded window and was a local 'institution' known as 'Pudds', sadly missed when it suddenly ceased trading in November 1986. So sudden was the closure that account customers who had been invited to a 'Gala Evening' were surprised to find themselves instead at a liquidation sale.

Another original is the off licence at No. 7, formerly Findlater, Mackie Todd. This had the air of a gentleman's club and a smell all its own. I would be sent to get the empty soda syphon exchanged for a new one.

A later addition in around 1928 was the large showroom and offices at No. 15 built for the 'Gas, Light & Coke Company' (becoming the North Thames Gas Board under nationalisation in 1949). This stood apart from the neighbouring shops and, being on a corner, left a triangle of land on which they built a shop at No. 14. This was The Broadway Music Salon, opened by Jack Shearmur in 1928, he ran it with his wife Betty. In the late 1950s he opened another shop at No. 4 for radio and television sales. They sold not just records but also musical instruments and sheet music.

Many of the shops closed for lunch, even the United Dairies and the Post Office closed (Chrystalls still does to this day). The shops opposite, from 23 to 25 were built later. The largest was Howards gentlemen's outfitters at 24. Francis Hair Fashions at 23, Kistrucks Bakers at 25a and Broadway Jewellers at 25.

On Station Approach were small single storey shops housing Fredrick Worley, Estate Agent and Fred Mason Taxis (still in business today). Fred himself still drove a cab then.

Two of these shops were occupied by coal merchants - Charrington, Gardner Lockett Ltd. and Rickett, Cockerill & Co. The coal was still delivered by train to the coal yard adjacent to Woodford Station (now the car park).

Supermarket shopping finally arrived in Woodford with the opening of Bishops Stores (now Budgens) in 1970. In those days, a new supermarket was invariably opened by a celebrity who would 'draw the crowds'. Bishops was opened by Ted Ray, a popular comedian of the day and also an accomplished violinist (he used to finish his act playing the violin). The advertising for the new store promised cut prices and they produced a leaflet highlighting the special offers in the shape of a violin case with "Some of Ted's Fiddles".

The railway line at Woodford has always been a great social divide and I know that some people never shopped on 'the other side of the line'. My mother was not such a snob and did cross the line as she used the London Co-Op butcher and John's the fishmonger at 14

Jubilee Parade. The Co-Op (60-66 Snakes Lane) had a grocers, greengrocers, butchers and chemist. If I was sent to buy anything I had to be sure to give my mother's Co-Op number (I can still recite it!) so that she got her 'divi' on the purchase. This was handwritten in a book and a small receipt given, if I returned home without the receipt I was sent back!

I remember the first self-service shop opening – Stitchers Stores – which was at 9 Jubilee Parade. My mother refused to shop there as she had no intention of picking the goods off the shelf herself! How times have changed! I loved going in there and watching the goods being 'rung up' on the huge electric cash register by the heavily made-up assistant. They also gave Green Shield Stamps which was a novelty. The Co-Op grocery shop was converted to self-service by simply pushing the counters together in the middle of the shop to allow the customers access to the wall shelves originally behind the counters. Another grocer on that side was Bishops Stores at 3 Rex Parade. They later opened the supermarket in The Broadway and closed the old shop. Next to them was the Essex County Library, before it moved to its present site in Snakes Lane West in 1961.

Further down was Cramphorns the seed merchants who sold garden supplies (No. 98), Edmund R. Goodrich, ironmongers (No. 100) and W. Waide Pollard & Sons, drapers (No. 102-104). All three had branches throughout East London and will be remembered by many I am sure.

Behind Pollards, down a passageway, was Sid Mavers barbers shop where I was sent to get my hair cut. At 108, Shepherd's bakers, still there and at 118 was Ely's cycle shop who also sold model aeroplane kits as I recall. Next door was the fish & chip shop and we used to come here for a sixpenny bag of chips on cold winter evenings!

Occupying a large site on the corner of Jubilee Parade and St Barnabas Road was Richards shoe shop (No. 7). Shoe shops then had their ranges displayed in the windows and the stock in boxes on shelves around the shop. There was no stock displayed inside. So having pointed out the style in the window, the assistant would climb up to fetch the required box. They were always busy and never seemed to have time to return the unsold boxes to the shelves so the shop floor would be covered in shoe boxes! Next door was a parade of small shops – Jubilee Market. The Floral Shop was first and next to that was the clock and watch repairer, S.C. Lampard. He used to open only on a Saturday morning and once he had taken in enough work for the rest of the week, he closed. At the end was a snack bar.

Also on Jubilee Parade was Gurneys the bakers with a long queue on a Saturday morning. It was still warm from the oven and just wrapped in thin tissue paper. We were entering the age of the 'sliced loaf' and Gurneys was taken over by Clarks Bakery, sadly no more was there a smell of freshly baked bread and it was delivered instead by lorry from an 'industrial' bakery.

We did not shop much on the High Road but there were some shops that my mother used on occasion. A.D. Stephens glass and china shop (No. 72) had a long arcade entrance with

showcases and a large room full of crockery. My grandmother bought dresses and hats from Ann Paget 'Costumiers' (No. 78). The plaster mannequins in the window were past their best with chipped features! She met her friends for coffee at The Pantry (No. 60) which was a very gentele little tea shop. The cheaper café was The Coffee Bean in Johnstone Road, over the shoe shop (No. 2) (where I was kitted out with Start-Rite shoes).

There were certainly more food shops on the High Road then. Three grocers (including Waitrose at No. 74), three butchers – Chapmans at 40 (still there) Frank Harris at 66 and Wheelers in Johnstone Road. The latter is a fine 18th century example of an Essex clapboarded building which was extensively damaged by fire in February 1972. It has been skilfully restored and is now Prezzo Restaurant. A fishmonger at 46, Emberson's had a greengrocers and florist shops (32-34). Wm. Chalkley the baker at 48. Broomes Chemists (now Lloyds) is still at 52.

Shopping in Woodford has changed greatly since the 1960s. Today, we are used to driving to a large supermarket and doing a 'big shop' and using the local convenience stores for smaller purchases. We are accustomed to finding all our needs under one roof, no more queuing at several shops. After delivery vans and 'errand boys' on bikes disappeared with the introduction of supermarkets, in recent years online shopping and home delivery has become increasingly commonplace.

In the 1960s many of The Broadway shops were still trading as when they originally opened, now only a handful remain that were around in the 1900s. However, there are now plenty of restaurants and clothes shops instead, catering for a different market.

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