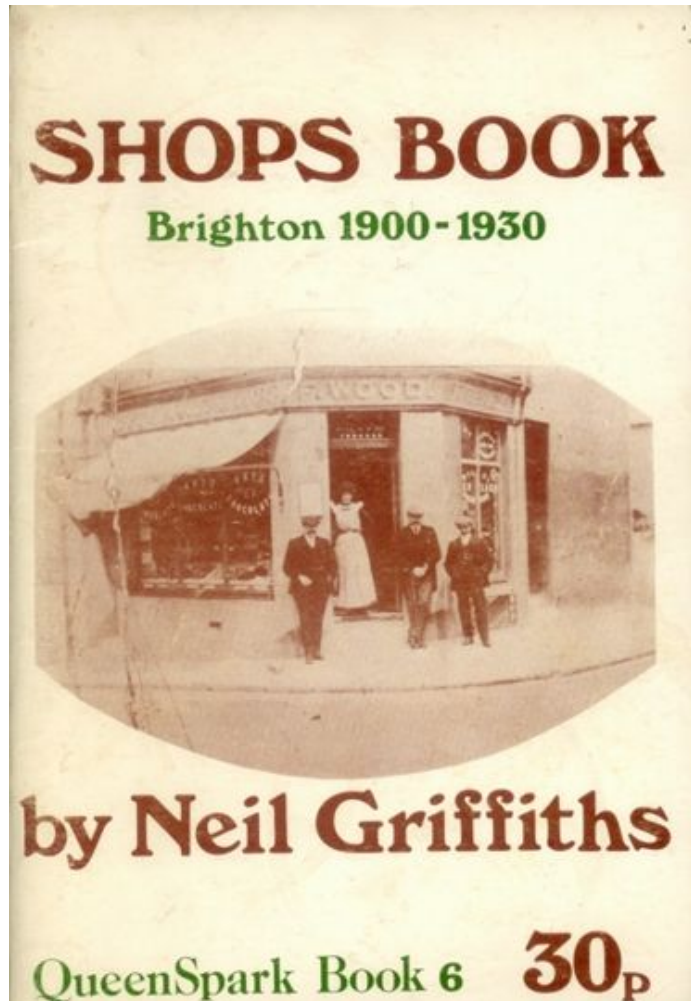


About QueenSpark Books

QueenSpark Books was founded in 1972 as part of a campaign to save the historic Royal Spa in Brighton's Queen's Park from being converted to a casino. The campaign was successful and it inspired participants to start collecting memories of people living in Brighton and Hove to preserve for future generations. QueenSpark Books is now the longest-running organisation of its kind in the UK.

More than one hundred books later, as part of our 45th anniversary celebrations, we are making the original texts of many of our out-of-print books available for the first time in many years.



This 1978 book is about shopkeepers and street traders, based on interviews with people whose families had been trading in Brighton for decades. These vivid memories tell stories of hardship, determination, camaraderie, and enterprise. This important book captures a lost era in Brighton's working class life and its original 1978 foreword is today as much a piece of history as the stories contained in this text.

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SHOPS BOOK Brighton 1900-1930

Editor: Neil Griffiths

Introduction

The format of this book is different from that of the QueenSpark books produced so far. Its subject is shops and shopkeepers: it draws together the various experiences of shopkeepers in East Brighton, as told to us by them, and attempts to make meaning out of their testimony.

Shopping plays a major part in all our lives; we are all affected by changes in shops and prices. In spite of this, there has been no satisfactory study of the subject, or of many of the other day-to-day activities which affect and have affected our lives- the pub, the street, neighbours, allotments, social security, unemployment, etc.

One of QueenSpark's aims is to remedy this situation - to help us to understand, and then control, the changes which take place in our lives. This book will throw some light on such questions as: Have things got better or worse for the consumer as a result of changes in shops and shopping? What price have we paid for the dominance of the super-market?

Shops have changed greatly in the last one hundred years. The small-scale producers and the craftsman shopkeepers have given way to large firms which control many of the stages of production from factory to shop. The 1875 directory for East Brighton listed 35 bootmakers, 3 breweries, 19 dress-makers, 15 tailors, 2 watchmakers, 2 tanners, 2 brushmakers and 2 basketmakers. By 1974 they had virtually all disappeared, apart from one jeweller and one costumer. There has been a decline in the number of small shops in general, and a growth in the size of large multiples such as Allied Suppliers, associated British Foods Ltd. (£524 million profit in 1970), Great Universal Stores Ltd. (£425 million profit in 1970) and Marks and Spencers (£416 million profit in 1970).

This process has been very rapid since 1945. Between 1961 and 1969 there was an estimated twenty-two percent reduction in the number of grocery shops in Britain, and this trend is likely to continue: Sainsbury's, who had 114 supermarkets in 1970, predict that they will have 250 by 1980.

The professional shopkeeper has stood up to the multiples better than the small shop-keeper, though their number in this area has declined steadily. In 1935 there were 4 chemists and 17 butchers; by 1974 there were 2 chemists and 7 butchers. (The Retail Alliance, representing 11 trade associations, estimated in 1969 that retail chemists were closing at the rate of 200 a year. Incidentally, Boots made a profit of £233 million in 1970).

The number of food shops and general shops in this area has dropped from 152 food shops and 42 general shops in 1910, to 108 food shops and 25 general shops in 1951, and 59 food shops and 7 general shops in 1974. The closeness of the producer and the consumer has, with this change, been replaced by a whole chain of production and distribution, in which the consumer has little power to influence decisions of price and quality. Changes always happen at someone's expense: there are always victims in our system.

Due to these structural changes, shopping habits too have changed over the last one hundred years. At the beginning of the period, Saturday evening was the favoured time for shopping, especially in areas such as the Richmond Buildings. Weekday shopping was done at the corner store or in the many specialised shops: shopping was an every-day exercise. Today most people shop only two or three times a week at large super-markets and use their neighbourhood store only for additional items. There are still some people, though, who are willing to pay higher prices for the personal service at 'their shops'.

Aside from the decline in numbers and alterations in shopping habits, there has been a change in the services which the small shopkeeper provides. Throughout the last century, many craftsmen shopkeepers changed their skills from production to service: for example, the local bootmaker became a shoe repairman. Increasingly the rich can afford the skills of the artisan.

In the past, too, the shop amounted in some cases to a neighbourhood centre, performing a variety of social activities. Many shop-keepers recall customers stopping to gossip about family and neighbours: some customers came in to talk even when no purchases were made. The bakery ovens were used by women to cook their own food and bake their bread, and the chemist was expected to advise on health and medicines, and even to administer treatment.

Another major change in the social life of the neighbourhood has been the elimination of street selling and the decline in street life in general. The disappearance of the barrow boys, many of whom lived in this area, has been one aspect of this change.

In the pages which follow these changes and their effects are traced through the lives of shopkeepers and street traders themselves. To understand these processes, we must be aware that shopkeepers were a varied group of people, with different skills, different outlooks, and consequently, wide variations in social and economic status.

Types of Traders

THE PROFESSIONAL SHOPKEEPER was distinctly better off than the rest. He was usually an employer, and had learnt the skills of his trade as an apprentice and manager. He often belonged to trade professional associations such as the Brighton and Hove Butchers Association, the Mid-Sussex Meat Traders Association, the Brighton and Hove branch of the Pharmaceutical Society, the Brighton and Hove Association of Pharmacy, and the local Newsagents Association. These organisations supplied information, sponsored social functions, and developed and protected status. What is more, the associations collaborated with the producers to maintain prices. Some associations even helped to control the number of shops, to reduce competition. The professional shopkeeper was a man of substance, both personally and in public affairs.

THE SMALL SHOPKEEPER was less well off than the professional, had a lower status in the neighbourhood and depended solely upon his family to staff his shop. These ventures were often very risky because they were based on small amounts of borrowed capital and little or no experience in trading. The relative ease of starting a shop of this kind encouraged many to try their hand at it, so that competition was often fierce. In Southover Street alone in 1875, there were 8 grocers, 5 bakers and 8 greengrocers. In 1890, there were 5 confectioners, two of which, Mrs. Payne's and E. Keeping's, were next door to one another at numbers 27 and 28! This degree of competition, and the poverty of many of the customers, meant that credit was a necessity. This added to the risk, especially as suppliers frequently demanded cash payments on delivery.

STREET SELLERS included barrow boys, costermongers and street traders, who were itinerants, without capital, a fixed shop or regular customers. Their trade was risky but, at times, very lucrative. Also belonging to this group were rag and bone men and 'knockers' (men who collected 'antiques' from house to house), who were buyers as well as sellers of goods. They were scavengers who cleaned up the markets and salvaged goods that would otherwise have no retail value. These traders tended to 'cut' prices in the shops and were consequently spurned by the others, especially the professional shopkeeper. The street-seller concerned himself solely with 'grafting' for a living, by any means available.

To some extent, each type of trader had his own type of consumer- a set of regular customers. But the shopping public was increasingly being tempted away into the large grocery chain stores that we know today. This competitive challenge was met by the small shopkeepers by the fixing of prices. Therefore any 'price-cutting' was frowned upon, whether by barrow boys, any shop-keeper, the multiples, or the local Co-operative Society.

Let us now examine some actual examples of each of these shopkeeping types.

The Professional Shopkeeper

CHEMISTS:

Mr. and Mrs. Stanger opened their own chemist shop in 1935. Mrs. Stanger had qualified as a pharmacist in 1925. Mrs. Stanger's father was a Hove publican, and Mr. Stanger's family were originally farmers. Both had very secure family backgrounds, in which church-going and a hymn-singing get-together around the piano on Sundays were the highlight of the week. They were respectable and conservative in outlook. Both had been apprenticed to the trade in the established manner.

"We started with two shops, one in Elm Grove and one further up Elm Grove. Then we bought one at Woodingdean. I did all the buying at No. 74. The other shops sent orders to me each. Eventually we sold Woodingdean- it got too much. In our other shop we had one qualified man and an assistant. In the main store there was me and my wife, another qualified girl, an assistant cleaner; we had a boy with a hand cart for deliveries."

"I did enjoy business. I was my own boss and had very good staff. Our ambition as chemists was to give service and oblige people. And we made a reasonable profit.

We got married and said we are not going to earn a lot of money and save it. What money we have will go on the children's education."

"It was a happy little concern and the customers appreciated the service we gave. In the old days we made everything- it was a craft. You made your own pills. Now it's mostly counting out tablets."

"The hours of opening when we first started were 8:00 till 7:00, and 12:00 till 1:00 and 6:00 till 8:00 on Sundays. But eventually we stopped that as the assistants wouldn't stand for it."

The O'Flinns of Islingword Road had a similar experience. Mrs. O'Flinn qualified at the same time as Mrs. Stanger- both had professional status and were members of the Pharmaceutical Society. In both businesses, there was an element of security which was not evident in the beginnings of poorer general shop-keepers.

BUTCHERS:

Mr. Stone still lives above the butcher shop at Elm Grove which his father purchased in 1912. It had originally belonged to Mrs. Stenning, who established the business in 1884. Mr. Stone recalls:

"I started here on December 23, 1938. Father and mother managed it before me- I worked for them. They came here on November 5, 1912.

I stayed here until I was 17 and then went away to London to have my experiences, and done three years slaughtering; I also went through the business of the butchery shop in two London shops. From there I went to Reading- then to Swindon, and, on the death of my father, I had to come back here."

"Both my grandmothers were shopkeepers- one originated in the Blue Post public house, North Road- her parents kept that. They also had a dairy in Surrey Street. She ran the milk side of the business- they took it round. From there grandmother went into Lewes Road and opened her own business. Grandfather was a railway driver. She had a family of five. She opened that shop over 100 years ago. She worked every hour God made, but she couldn't read nor write. She was a wonderful woman- she could sell anything, she had a wonderful personality. She was greengrocer, toffee-maker, ice-cream maker, boots and shoes, clothes, fish, nuts, potatoes, bananas. My grandmother sold it all. Her name was Brooks- single name Dockerill. It was a general shop. My father found my mother out by her living up in the little shop. He married quite young- she was 16. My grandmother through the general shop got to know about the shop going up here. She said, 'I'll get it for you. You'll be okay'. They had confidence in him, and another thing, Swift and Co. down the market took a liking to my father and said, 'Don't worry about paying, I'll fill your shop full of meat- I know you'll pay me and you'll sell it'. You know, the first Saturday of trading they took 100 golden sovereigns."

"Father was educated in Bedford and worked for a firm there until he was 14. From there he came to London and he spent his time with Mr. John Sainsbury's brother-in-law in Park Lane, Tottenham. Then he decided at 19 to come to Brighton, as W. R. Fletcher were opening meat companies all over England. He took over one in Lewes Road at 19. Then a relative found out this shop was to let and he wanted to be his own master- he was a well-tutored gentleman in the occupation-he made a good master butcher and he was a judge of cattle at the markets. He went into the wholesale business and their shop has served every shop in Brighton and Hove in its time."

"We had four staff and father and mother to start off with. And that went up to seven and nine staff at once, and three in the office. It was a very large staff. And we had horses and traps, where you sat on 'buggies' and opened the back and put the meat in. I drove one at the age of 12. Then I had an iron bicycle with a frame- a carrier bicycle- I had to do all the districts before Moulsecoomb was built out to Whitehawk.

This was what I had to do. I was trained. Go to the side entrance and sometimes the servants wore white hats, collars, and aprons, and black stockings and shoes. I had to go to the door, knock and shout 'Butcher'- as they opened the door, always touch my forehead with no hat on or touch the peak of my cap. And this is how I had to address them: 'Good morning, madam, is there anything you'd like this morning, would you like any steak, any chops, any part of meat, anything for the animals, and when would you like me to bring it back?' She'd tell me and I'd write it in my book or if she gave me a note I'd put it in my book, and say 'Good morning Madam'. Then come here - tell my mother - she'd write it in the book and then read it out to my father - he would get it done out by the staff - bone it, put skewers in it - tie it around and put it on a dish if it was a short distance - if it was more I'd have to put a thing on my shoulder and a tray with four handles and I'd walk up to the doorway, put it on the side of the door. Give them the tray, back it would come.

If they paid me I'd write 'Paid with Thanks', my name and date, 'Thank you Madam'. If she didn't pay it was reported when I got back - it was in the book. I would never ask for it unless I was asked to do so. If I was told not to leave the article without the money, I daren't do it -father was very disciplined. He used to inspect me, 'Come on, let's have a look at your neck - come on out the back'- he'd scrub my neck."

This way of doing business was typical of the professional shopkeeper - characteristically polite and respectable in manner, but with accurate bookkeeping. It is clear that the Stones' trade was not only amongst the local railway workers, but also catered to middle-class households with servants.

Did your father ever have trouble with employees? "Yes, he did. One of his horses ran away - he had told the man to be careful with it. The fellow walked in here on a Friday - he said: 'Where's the horse?' 'It's run away guvnor.' 'Get out the back'. He went out the back. My father went out there, he said: 'I'll give you a bloody good hiding' - he used to swear - and he knocked him down - then the other two started going for me father. He knocked them down and he came back in here - still as cool as a cucumber. 'Bang, bang' - he could use them."

Did you have much competition? "We had all of the other shops, but we held our own. My father's theory was really good. If you sold your best parts to Hove you'd make more money than what you could in this district, so what you got left you could lower - so we had big trays with anything from 4d to £1 upwards cut up of a morning. He'd start at 6:00, he was never late, and the staff - no messing around - we'd go on till 10:00 at night. I should say the profitable side of the business was the money side - so the biggest customers were in Preston, Hove."

The Archers' butchery shop in Islingword Road developed in a similar pattern. Mr. Archer's father came to Brighton in 1930; his grandfather had had his own

weaving business in York and was later a fishmonger in East Anglia. His father worked as a manager for Fletchers, a large butchery chain, just as Mr. Stone senior had done.

Mr. Archer recalls that his father's aim was ... "to get to Brighton to see the lay-out of things. He always wanted to start on his own. Father got to know people in the trade. He was a member of the Association (Brighton and Hove Meat Traders Association). He started at 6:30 and closed at 7:00. Buying was his department. He'd be down there (at the meat market) at 5:30 or so. I would cut up meat, make sausages, perhaps nipping the odd orders out. We did a mixed trade - you would do because we were reasonably near the front - the boarding house trade. We had a regular trade, 80 percent of the people you served were people you served each week."

GROCERS:

Mr. Marshall, the chimney sweep of Islingword Road, remembers shops in Richmond Buildings, which have now been demolished. Amongst them was Mr. Parr's grocery, which bears many of the marks of the higher class grocer, even though Richmond Buildings was at the centre of one of the poorest neighbourhoods in Brighton. Mr. Marshall recalls: "Decent people lived there. There were some good shops down there. Several people made fortunes in Richmond Buildings. My family, and Parr's the grocers, had a couple of lovely shops at 13 and 14. Bill Parr used to live at Southwick - came in every morning with rolled umbrella, bowler and brief case. He had staff - Miss Hawkins, Baker a crippled chap, Tommy Ming, and one of the Taylors and an errand boy. He started on his own. He sold to local people - a good trade. Gave credit till Friday; he had plenty of money, didn't bother about a bad debt or two."

The Working Shopkeeper

The experience of the working shopkeeper was quite different from that of his professional counterpart. His economic and social life was more integrated into local life, because these shopkeepers were dependent on neighbourhood custom.

GENERAL SHOPS:

Miss Bristow of Elm Grove tells of her father's experiences in his early days of shopkeeping:

"Father came here from Horsham in 1905. Before that he worked at King and Barnes Brewery. He had 19s. a week. They saved up fifty golden sovereigns and bought this shop... my dad's brother was in business in the same style you see, up the hill."

Did your parents come from a shopkeeping family? "No, not at all. Mother- her father died at 40, lived at Handcross; at 12 she left school to look after her nine brothers and sisters, while her mother went to a hand laundry and did ironing from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. for one shilling a day in 1880. Father left home at 12- his father did a lot of betting- used to have rows in the house. He left home, walked to Newhaven and took a job on the docks. He went to Lewes and worked in a grocery shop for quite a while. I think that's where he got the idea of having the shop. His brother had a shop at the top of the hill- we used to come there- we liked the look of it- it was through Dad seeing how well he got on that made him do it. He could get a job from here perhaps and they could live here and perhaps the shop would be enough to carry on. They worked hard, very hard.

They paid £50 for the incoming of the shop- goodwill and stock and everything. When we started selling and people came and asked for stuff, it was all dummies- two dozen bottles of Sarsons vinegar- all doubles, the whole lot. It was all fake. He couldn't do anything and 50 sovereigns in those days was a terrific lot. Whole lot of their money had gone. Dad explained to one or two wholesalers how he had been let down and they let him have stuff on sale or return- gradually he built the business up. After a few months he'd got it on its feet, you know. He bought a little Russian pony and trolley and he went all round the streets selling stuff. Mother carried on at the shop and looked after my brother and I and did all the cooking and made all the clothes."

What hours were you open? "Dad got up at 4:00 or 5:00 in the morning- until midnight we were open. Every day, and Christmas Day was the day you took most money. They had the money, you see. Father said he had to keep open because he wanted the money. He began to get on his feet."

What did you sell? "Everything- fruit, green-groceries, plants, flowers, cigarettes, sweets, and we made all the minerals- 'pint monsters'. One very hot day we made 700 pint monsters-at a penny a pint. All the empty bottles had to be carried out to the kitchen. My father sold and my mother, brother and self- one was washing, one was gassing and one was putting the syrup in. Gradually we packed it up, it was getting too much. The shop itself was gradually getting better."

Did your father employ anyone? "No, only errand boys- we didn't have the money- my father wasn't the type- it was a one-man business, you know. With a personal business they want the man who owns the shop to serve them. There's that interest in pleasing the customer."

The Bristows' experience illustrates a number of features of the poorer shopkeeper: the low capital necessary to start up; the riskiness attached to this commitment; the need to produce much of the stock; and the hard work and long

hours required to get the business started. Her father, like many others, had ambitions to own a little shop, encouraged by family trade connections and furthered by work experience.

Initially, the shop was seen as a source of supplementary income run by the wife, whilst her husband carried on in paid employment- the shop's income would go to pay the rent, which had to be paid wherever the family lived. Street selling from a cart provided an important addition to shop revenue. The shop, like so many others, was essentially a family business in which all members supported the undertaking. Typically, many of the goods sold were processed or packaged on the premises.

GREENGROCERS:

Mrs. Wheatley's family experience was similar. It was her mother who possessed the commercial drive in the family: she operated a number of greengrocery businesses at different times in Brighton, Hove and Portslade before moving to Richmond Buildings in November, 1914, where they stayed for twenty-one years. The family was, for a good part of their shopkeeping days, poor- as poor as many of their customers. Mrs. Wheatley's father's drinking did not help, and forced the family into the pawn shop many a time. Eventually, her father took the Oath and joined the Salvation Army.

What did your mother's parents do? "I don't know. I think her father was a shopkeeper-she said she was born under a greengrocers shop at the corner of Bread Street. I didn't know my father's parents- they weren't shop-keepers. Father was a country man- he came to Brighton and worked for a wholesaler at the market... my mother had several businesses- one up in Southover Street, she had one up in Portslade, and one in North Road, Brighton at different times. Then she had a stall on the seafront.

She gave up the stall in 1914... She didn't do bad, but war broke out in 1914. The day war was declared the beach was packed- then they all cleared off. She packed up after that. She sold fruit and drinks- made them herself. She had a lodger in those days who died and when the funeral was on, Mum talked to Mr. Sinden, the undertaker of Richmond Buildings, and he said the shop next door to him was coming vacant and mother took it... She opened that shop on £6 borrowed money- she spent that on stock. She rented it, never bought a place."

Mrs. Wheatley remembers her father doing a round with a barrow: "He gave up his barrow work just after mother had the shop. He used to leave the house at about 8:00- at one time he had a donkey and trolley. He went all up Ditchling Road way- he knocked on doors and he had some regular customers up there. Mother got up at 4:00 in the morning- down the Market, buy her stuff- come back, have an hour's rest- cup of tea and go back down to see it delivered- to see it

was put on the van or you might lose it. Mother was a very good business woman."

"I'll tell you how badly off we were then- we hadn't got a chair to sit on- we were sitting on boxes, and mother had to wash my brother's shirt Friday to be clean Monday for school."

What hours were you open? "No limit until the war broke out. Saturday night she was open till 12:00 or 1:00 a.m. Had to have it all cleared away and out by 12:00. Saturdays they used to be allowed to put a stall in the gutter."

Why did she leave shopkeeping? "She had to give up for health reasons. Father died in 1925- we carried on till 1932. It wasn't getting any more profitable as she got older- it got too much for her. Average profits were not that great- we didn't make that much money. You had to compete with others."

Mrs. Wheatley's mother was typical of the many women proprietors who managed family shops at this time. The directories reveal that women proprietors were common- especially in laundries, greengroceries, confectioneries and various other dealerships.

Fred Howell remembers his father's greengrocery shop in Carlton Hill: "He did a laundry round at first, he used to go round collecting laundry. My mother used to do laundry work. Then he thought he'd start a green grocery and he started a round up- all up St. James' Street and around Kemp Town. He had a barrow at first, then he got a horse and cart, then he worked that up to another horse and cart, and my brother took it on- then when he got married, he gave it up and went up to the station.

"Then father kept it on till he went in the army in the First World War. Then I went in the War when I was 18 and came out in April 1920. When I worked first I got a job at Cooks, the jam people. They had eight shops in Brighton, fruit shops. My father saw Mr. Cook at the market- he got me a job as an errand boy."

Why didn't you work for your father? "He didn't like the idea of it, he said it would be better for me to go out with strangers than to work for him."

What year did he start the shop? "I must have been four or five. No, I was younger than that. I was born in Carlton Hill over a greengrocers. So he must have started before 1900."

Who took over the shop when your father went to war? "My eldest sister. My mother died in 1915. I couldn't do much- I used to come home and go down the market and buy the vegetables for my sister. She ran the shop."

Were the round and shop lucrative? "Fair amount, yes. He didn't do too bad. We came out of the shop before the War was over. Rent was 21s., rent and rates- it was a lot. My money was only 6s. a week, I used to give my sister all that- she'd give me back 1s. pocket money- it wasn't a fat lot."

When did you close the shop? "Well, we never used to worry. If anybody kept coming along we opened the door to them- perhaps some-one had run out of coal in winter. We'd run down and get some rather than see them go short. Kids would come in for a 4d. apple. But we shut up properly at about 8:00, Saturdays and Sundays too. Saturday night at 11:00 o'clock we'd be skinning rabbits. Then we'd hang the skins up on nails in the cellar- when we got about 100 dozen we'd send them up to London. That would buy his Christmas stock- his nuts and oranges and all that- he used to save it for that. He done alright in that respect."

How was the shop different from those of to-day? "Well, there used to be casks of vinegar. Greengrocers used to sell them from a firm, name of Sarsons- used to sell it loose by the pint- tipped out of a tap. People came in with a jug or bottle- used for pickling, you know...course we used to sell potatoes by the gallon in them days, not by the pound, and cauliflower and cabbage- so much each. Monkey nuts used to be so much a pint."

Did you make anything yourself? "My father used to pickle walnuts and onions- he done a lot of that. He sold rabbits- frozen from Australia. We had winkles and whelks on a Sunday- he used to cook them in the scullery. We had a man in Church Street, name of Phil West- he supplied us. Father went to fetch them. Cooked them in a copper. The people he served with greengroceries all up Kemp Town and that, I used to go out taking winkles and whelks on a Sunday. So many pints each. I used to have to get back in time to go to 3:00 Sunday School. I had a hard time of it when I was young with my father."

What else did you sell? "Only greengrocery and chopped wood. He used to buy a lot of old boxes and he used to make bundles, my father did- tied up with string. He sold pork and rabbit."

What was your father like? "Lot of people say I'm the image of him. He worked thundering hard. He was pretty careful in his younger days. Mother helped him all she could. She helped him by doing the laundry work, first off. So they saved a bit of money."

Howells' grocery, like many other shops, was started on capital saved by taking in laundry. The initial effort was concentrated on building up a round in conjunction with the shop, a typical feature of other working greengroceries.

The business was essentially a family one, and everyone worked hard at it. It was necessary to process many of the goods in the shop: cooking the whelks,

chopping wood, skinning rabbits, pickling onions and walnuts, measuring out vinegar all took time and effort.

BAKERS:

Mr. Hider tells of the beginnings of his father's bakery business: "I was born in 1900. My father bought that business for about £150. He borrowed it from his grandmother who had a little laundry. There used to be a lot of little laundries then. The old ducks had half a dozen women, you know- they'd got to work at 8:00 in the morning and work till 8:00 at night and they got 3s./6d. for that. Great-grandmother had one- only a couple of women under her. She lent father £150- I suppose he bought the business when he was 22- that was in 1892."

"Father was always in Brighton- at various baking jobs. He left school and my great-grandmother put him in a bakery at St. James' Street: he got 6s. a week. They used to chuck their money about in them days! He had six or eight jobs as a baker. It's the only way to learn the trade."

What made him take up business? "He was always a thrifty man. Different from me! He married a year or two after he took the business over. He done pretty well, as they did in them days. In them days all the people around here used to keep rabbits and chickens and pigeons and he used to sell all the stuff for feeding them. Then there was horses, and he sold hay and straw. He was a baker and a corn-merchant."

"Some people used to make their own bread and we used to bake it - a farthing a loaf. On Friday afternoons they all used to bring their cakes and we used to bake them for them. One penny for that. Sundays, they'd bring their Sunday dinners; we charged 2d. Christmas dinners we charged 8d. for a leg of pork and chicken, 1s. for turkeys - that's basted and everything. He used to have one man to help him like - in the bake-house. He'd push the bread round on a barrow."

Where did you get the flour? "You had to buy it off the miller in them days. See, the miller owned all the bakeries. He rented it and paid £150 goodwill when he went in. The miller was Smith of Britannia Mill, Portslade. They'd deliver flour each week and collect rent every quarter. It was tied, see."

Did father work long hours? "Yes, in them days you had to. I used to start in the bakery with him about half past five, and we worked till 11.00 am. Then we pushed the barrow round till about 5.00 in the afternoon - downtown and up Elm Grove. We came back to sweep the bakehouse up and chop wood and get the coal in. I used to get 5s. a week. I finished at 7:30 p.m.; he said I wouldn't wear out, but I'd perhaps rust out."

Were there other small bakeries? "Oh yes - they started to die out just before the second war. The competition got too big. In them days there was two big firms in Brighton - Clarkes and Gingham. They spread shops everywhere, and of course latterly, the big ones like Sunblest, Mothers Pride opened all big bakeries, and had wrapped sliced bread - it became the popular thing - we couldn't do that - we didn't have the big machinery. In the old days there was the cottage loaf- top and bottom. They used to be $\frac{3}{4}$ d. per 2 lb.- weigh 'em on scales and if they didn't weigh enough you'd cut some off another loaf and make it 2 lb. Average price was 3d. a loaf and you'd have stale loaves on a barrow and they'd be four loaves for 6d."

"He had a bakehouse - with a loft at the top. Mother sold bread from the shop while dad and I went delivering to the forty to sixty customers on our round."

"He paid off his debt in a few years. Good going in those days. Mother and him working hard together - her having three kiddies a bit sharpish - she had a rough time when she was young."

COAL MERCHANTS:

The distinction between the professional and the working shopkeeper is somewhat arbitrary and some shopkeepers possessed features of both these types. Mr. Grinyer's father, for example, though the employer of five men in a flourishing coal business, undertook some of the same tasks as his employees, and did not adopt the middle-class habits of other more typical professional shopkeepers. Mr. Grinyer's mother and brother also took an active part in the business.

How did your father take over the business? "Well, he worked for a man named Sergeant, and he worked for him for years, and he was a coal merchant. After that my father took the business over."

What else did you sell? "Coal, coke and wood. We picked it up from the station- weighed it up, up there. We never had no storage- only in the coal shed- so we had to go to the station frequently- practically all day long, with five horses and carts. My brothers all worked in the business- all five of them- but they left the business in their twenties. We all started at twelve years of age. They was up the station, I had to get things ready for when he came home- load up coke and wood for him to take on his rounds- go round hawking. All through the streets up Albion Hill- he sold from horse and cart. I used to go along to school- take the orders out with a barrow- $\frac{3}{4}$ cwt. bags- deliver them- then come home for dinner and go to school again. Come home from school and carry on."

What was the work like? "We all, and the men, used to do other deliveries in the afternoon, see- they'd do furniture moving on the vans. We also did brick carting,

sand carting. In the mornings they was all out hawking. Used to start 4:00 a.m. at the station weighing up and loading up five horses and carts before 8:00. 8:15 bell would go at the works- home and have breakfast, then we went out. Father went out hawking just the same. Me and mother used to go round collecting money and mother helped with the books... it was a profitable business."

"Men had to look after the horses - had to come in of a morning and water them. Sometimes Dad used to go down about 6:00 and water them and feed them. Often there wasn't much work in the afternoon - they never knocked off - there was always something to do - painting the vans up, washing them down, cleaning the harness. They'd finish about 5:00 or 6:00. I left school at 14 and worked up to 8:00 at night. There were five employees; when my brothers went you had to employ staff." Was it seasonal? "As busy in the summer as the winter - people would stock it in ready for the winter. In the summer we had a chance to look after the smaller customers; see, we had some well-off customers."

Was it competitive? "Well, it was all trying to beat one another - all the local merchants were. That's how you got your trade."

Any disagreements? "Sometimes - over prices. There was a confederation, see. To get summer prices cut - we agreed on them - well some of the other blighters come and cut your throat - sell it cheaper. You had to do as best you could. We treated our customers well and of course they stayed with us. All the coal merchants got together just like unions, see. We went to meetings, once a month with about 50 merchants there."

"After my father died in 1930 I took over the business. My wife did the weighing up of coal- we had a greengrocers as well there, in the same shed. Well, with the bombing they was all bombed out there- the greengrocers- so we started up."

What did your wife's family do? "Her father was a locksmith- local- he could turn his hand to anything. He had a shop up Western Road way- he had a fair-sized place- done fancy ironwork."

Was your business profitable? "It kept itself above water- that's about all. It worked well together. I gave up shopkeeping in the 1940's after the War and went into Allen West's."

As Mr. Grinyer's comments suggest, the working shopkeeper kept long hours. Before the shop even opened in the morning, the green-grocer had to buy and transport his produce from the market, which opened at 4:00 a.m. At 5:30, the baker had to start making the day's bread; the coal merchant had to weigh and load up at the station at 4:00 a.m. The shops then opened at 8:00 and closed when people stopped coming- usually at 8:30 in the evening on a weekday, but frequently as late as midnight on Saturdays. The keen competition amongst

working shopkeepers and with professionals, as well as the working hours of their customers, meant that opening hours had to be long.

Street Traders

This class of traders has historically been among the most impoverished sections of society. The low initial capital required to enter the trade resulted in intense competition, especially in times of social dislocation when many people could find no other jobs; for example, after the First World War and during the Thirties. Many barrow boys came from shopkeeping families which had fallen on hard times. Bad feeling often marked the relationship between the barrow boys and the shopkeepers, because of the competition between them. Eventually the authorities clamped down on street life of all kinds, no doubt supported and possibly inspired by the established traders of the town. The barrow boys were taken off the street and placed in the open market.

BARROW BOYS:

Most of the old itinerant barrow boys of Brighton have passed away, or become established tradesmen. The Upper Gardner Street Market still has amongst its stalls that of Mr. Winton, who was once an itinerant street trader:

"Grandfather started off in the business of picture-frame making and gilding- Winton and Russell. He was his own governor. And my father worked for Grandfather. He took it over for a time, but there were nine brothers- one was a sign writer- so he and my father, who was a picture-frame maker, did all the work for Biddells and different people. My mother died at 28 in 1918. Her family were an army family- a bit on the snobbish side. The Diplocks were a little bit toffee-nosed."

"I first started as a page boy in 1922 at the Bedford Hotel. I stayed three years and then went to Grand Metropole as commis waiter. Went to the Sussex yacht club from 1927 to 1930 as steward. From 1930 I went out as street trader."

Why street trading? "Well, I was out of work. 1930's was very hard. I married in 1927, lost a daughter in 1927. Had a son in 1931, another in 1933. Well, a friend who I knew was a street trader and he said, 'Well, you'll better come out and help me', and I found it a good paying proposition. After the first day out as a street trader he said, 'This is what you've got today', and it was £1 each, which was a hell of a lot of money in those days."

"We laid out £1- we used to buy 12 pounds of tomatoes for 2s. and you sell at 4d. a pound, which is getting money for money- return to market and lay out £2 and go out and make it into £4. They were the best tomatoes available."

Were they the same as the shopkeepers' stock? "Oh yes, street traders always got the benefit of the late market. Always. Shops buy overnight or early morning. So when the wholesalers got anything left- when they've got another commodity coming in next day, especially when there's a glut of something, they know they've got to make room for it, for the next supply coming in. So they'll ask you a 'silly price' and you'll bid them a 'cowardly price'."

Was there other jargon? "Plenty, it's all over- London just the same. We had a man in Brighton called Joe Catts- going back 30 years- and he sold all stuff that was deck wash- it got damaged by the sea- fruit, apples, oranges. We used to give it the name of 'wafferty'!- means sold with all faults. Any-thing we bought was wafferty- wholesalers sold it this way. We bought and we had to sell it, know what I mean? Lots and lots of times it turned out against us. We only had £1 to lay out- we hadn't a clue what it would be like. We'd buy five cases of oranges at 4s. a case and if you opened a case and saw clouds of smoke, we'd go back and we'd get no money back. And perhaps this was the £1 we'd borrowed off my partner's father, Joe Catts- he was a Russian Jew- he'd give you another two cases. We had a barrel of apples off him for £1 which normally would be £3 or £4 a barrel. So you took a gamble. That's how we started dealing."

"You used to wait to buy that stuff late- you could never buy at 4:00 a.m. They used to come in on horses and carts from Shoreham, the farmers did. At 4:00 the shopkeepers were going mad to buy it- they left and well, they (the farmers) didn't want to take it back with them. 'Course, the pubs were open at 4:00 a.m. and they used to drink and come out a bit merry and they'd say, 'Well, we want so and so for this and that- £6 or £7', and we'd say, 'I'll give you £1 for the lot.' They'd go, 'We can't take that kind of money'-you walk away, 'Well, I'm going to go now'-you had to be an actor at the game. 'Er, come here, give us your money', old Bill Baker would say. He had a farm at Moulsecoomb."

Was there a Barrow Boy mentality? "Yes, I think with all people- how shall I describe it- who do fiddling for a living- you pick it up quickly- if you've got it in you. I took my father out-on one occasion with apples. He said, 'I just can't do it'. I'd say it's personality more or less- being flamboyant, outrageous- being your own boss."

Were you successful? "Well, during the 1930's it was terribly hard...! Were you ever on National Assistance at that time? "Of course- when you couldn't buy no fruit over the market. You had to do three days work up at Hollingdean for it."

"It's a different crowd today to when I was a young man. You were working till 8:00- you wanted to get home to pay what you earned out at home- to see what you'd left for the following morning. You could have a penny's worth of fish, a penny's worth of chips, and fivepence for cigarettes."

"In the old days you all went your own way. I pushed to Hove and Boundary Road, because I couldn't afford to keep getting pinched. Now they amalgamate in packs; years ago they didn't do that."

Were you cheaper than the shopkeeper? "I tried to be- sometimes you couldn't be- sometimes I have to give as much as the shops- so I work on less profit. I've got to. It's not a successful business now. Before you could lay out £1 to earn £2. Now you've got to lay out £10 to earn £1- that sums it up."

Describe some of the famous barrow boy characters. "There was Captain Lofthouse- he was the celery king- white heart celery- he sold nothing but celery. Like I sell bananas. See, we bought in the late market and if somebody had a lot of celery, the Captain would buy that. Whereas the shopkeeper would give 2d. or 3d. a head, he'd buy it for 1d. or less-he'd buy the lot. There was Banana O'Neil. I am the banana king now, the ex-banana king was Phoebe Foster- a man."

How did you get on with shopkeepers? "What as regards being against you? Actually, they were all for you... they say that the market brings them trade. No ill feelings whatsoever. Mr. Peters in Gardner Street and Mr. Les at the corner here, they'd trade with me sometimes if they were short of bananas."

Did you ever have any trouble with the police? "Oh yes. I went to prison for fines. Illegal trading- for fly-pitching. We used to pitch along Western Road where you weren't allowed to- until they brought in the by-laws that if you was there for the purpose of selling it was a fiver. Before, we could stay there until a copper walked by- immediately he'd gone by we'd pull the barrows down and start serving. The by-laws came in twenty years ago-so they dragged them off the street and they went as antique dealers. It's done them a favour- they're getting bundles of money now."

The more successful barrow boys, such as Johnnie Stevens, managed to make the transition from pushing a barrow on the street to a stationary stall in the open market. Mr. Stevens remembers his early days as an itinerant barrow boy:

"Before I lived with my father-in-law, my father was in the wholesale business and had shops in Kensington Gardens. When he died in 1912 I was so young that I had to give the wholesale up, I couldn't manage it. He died when I was fourteen or fifteen. 'Course, my mother sold the shops and all that, then I went on the street as a barrow boy. Mother sold the business in 1924. I met me wife and went to live with me father-in-law. He was one of the big heads of Oxford Street- the organisers of the market, and I carried on for all them years as a barrow boy, till 1936 I got a stall in the market."

What kind of shop did your father keep? "Greengrocery, nothing else. I followed him into the trade... I left school at 12. It was horse and cart in those days. My

day consisted of 2:30 down the wholesale, come back at 8:00, went to goods yard at the station- had five tons of potatoes- two of us used two barrows- then from there to the passenger station to meet him, in from London with sixty packages. Sometimes we got finished 12:00 at night. I had to come in and do a day's work in the shop, oh yes, as well. My pocket money was 2s./6d. a week. He made a marvellous profit."

Did he employ anyone? "Oh yes, he had five in the shop plus myself and sister. He had a marvellous business."

How did you attract customers to your barrow? "Well, 'course you wanted something good on the barrow. I mean, the rubbish sometimes sold. I used to believe in one thing- having something good. Generally one item- perhaps I'd have ten or fifteen apples and make show of them, or grapes or bananas. I sold more watercress than anybody. I've always been noted for it. I sold watercress when they had it loose- you'd take a couple of handfuls, 2d. or 3d."

Where did you get it? "Mrs. Tree- she was well known in watercress- I used to buy my stuff from her- she got it from Bosham for me and she'd deliver it. She was the wholesaler of watercress. She lived at Richmond Buildings but she sold from the Wholesale Market- her father and family did it."

What different types of street traders were there? "They'd all been brought up in greengroceries and fruit- it was all fruit and veg- except at Christmas you might get two or three barrows of dolls; where they got the dolls from I don't know but they were never paid for. Another instance, London Road was one year full of eggs- they never paid for them, I know. There were seven or eight barrows full of eggs; one of the main men was Reckman- he had three barrows in London Road all with eggs on. Some would sell anything- herring, fish, blankets one day, boot-polish and sweets the next."

Where did they get their supplies from? "Generally London- an advertising paper- they'd send it down. I went up to Islingword Road one day and there was a bankrupt stock there of sweetbreads- I think I bought it for thirty shillings the lot. I came straight down and put it on the stall."

Did you borrow money? "Oh yes, many a time. You'd go to the pawn shop and pawn something to get stock. Pawn a pair of scales; we'd lend some. You had to weigh everything, 'cos you still had weights and measures people around."

What sort of people were street traders? "Similar to myself. There wasn't any rich street traders. One would help the others. We had a butcher in Gardner Street, name of Carter. He thought he'd go to London and go into the fruit and greengroceries business and supply nobody else only barrow boys, and he did, and he had his shed in Jubilee Street. He'd go to London and buy four hundred

or five hundred packages and load that up and we'd all go to him- to work for him. Eventually he committed suicide- some were paying and some weren't. They got £10 or £15 worth of stuff of a week- and they wouldn't pay him. He thought there was a lot of profit- he'd average £2 off every barrow and he'd got 15 or 20 barrows working for him- that's a living."

Any attempt to organise the barrow boys was fraught with difficulties. Their independent attitude emerges from these interviews. Risk was part of the gamble of being a barrow boy, and they were used to living a hand-to-mouth existence. Any windfall earnings went on gambling and drinking, with no thought of saving for a rainy day or repaying loans.

What was the best day for profits? "Sunday mornings on the sea front, with the basket pitches in summer. You couldn't get many pears in the basket- you had someone coming down and filling you up all the time, like. I had relations in Essex Street- young boys came with a four-wheeler. The good time was from June, when the strawberries start, to the end of August, and Christmas too. It's terrible from when the kiddies go back to school right up to Christmas. If you earn expenses you're lucky people. If you got rainy weather, you couldn't go to work with a barrow. We just had to do the best we could."

Was there much fiddling in the old days? "Oh yes. I wasn't actually doing anything- I was getting a fair living, but the things that were done were diabolical, you know. I remember one of the street traders would not go to work one day but he would give change to one or the other of us. Anyone who comes up with a £1, they'd always be 2s. short. He'd get a day's work- we never used to take no notice of him- he'd just be standing around."

"And another thing, they was very clever on weight- the person who came up for 1 lb. of apples would get 3/4 lb. - just down on the scales- pull it up. That was the main thing- weight. You never knew what you got- beautiful show- and at the back perhaps they were half rotten."

Did people prefer to buy off the barrows? "They did in them sort of days because it was a lot cheaper. If the shop was 10d. a pound, they'd be 4d. They thought they got value for money, but they never did."

Did you have regular customers? "No, strangers all the time. The fiddlers could get away with it. Many of them came back but they never got no change. If they complained he'd say, 'What do you expect for 4d. a lb.?' Nowadays, it's different altogether- you're bound to change it, if it's not up to standard."

Any trouble with customers? "Oh yes, they'd take liberties- pick up the fruit and turn it over- you got to stop 'em doing that. I remember barrow boys in Western Road used to carry a cane with them- if you touched the barrow, they hit you."

The barrow boys were able to offer very competitive prices due to their arrangements in the wholesale fruit and vegetable market. This, together with the ability of 'fiddlers to get away with it', meant that the business of a street trader could sometimes be quite lucrative, although very risky. It also explains why it was easy for the itinerant barrow boys to 'carve up the shopkeeper', as Johnnie Stevens termed it- and there are strong suggestions that the shopkeepers were behind the move by council for the police to control the barrows, and limit them to fixed sites.

What were the problems of being a barrow boy? "The police. The police were problems. We used to work Gardner Street, not Upper Gardner Street- we were allowed five minutes to put our barrow down, then move again. If not we got fined. 'Course, the police were very good then and the fines were a matter of about 10s. in them days- we got a living. Especially from the basket pitches on the beach. You had to get up at half past three and get a pitch for yourself, otherwise you didn't get one. They were fighting for them."

Did you have a lot of trouble with the police? "No- they just booked you, name and address. I had a relation of mine that would not pay a fine- name of Foster- and he was convicted 120 times. He'd go to prison rather than pay a fine. And he was the worst barrow boy we had; he was always drunk. I've known him to be so drunk, he had a barrow load of bananas and he'd feed them to the horses along the sea front. You never knew when you were going to be taken, and if you were too saucy or anything like that, they'd just take the barrow. I was clever- I was always civil to the police- even in court- and very polite; many a time it's got me home with a small fine. Police tried hard to get the barrow boys- now you won't see a barrow boy."

Where did you sell? "We sold along London Road- you had to be careful there- but Gardner Street was our main street. You had to watch out because sometimes the police would be hiding in the shops- we were allowed just that five minutes to stop and serve and that's all."

Was there any particular group in Brighton who didn't like the barrow boys? "Only the shopkeeper... we used to carve up the shop-keepers, oh yes. Well, the only way they could get us was to tell the police, and the police would be hot on us when we left our barrow."

BARROW BOYS AND SHOPKEEPERS

The fly-pitchers were the targets for shop-keepers' attacks on barrow boys. Stall holders with regular pitches in market streets such as Upper Gardner Street often benefited the shopkeeper as the market attracted customers. The fly-pitchers plagued the poorer class of greengrocer. The reaction of many small

shop-keepers to barrow boys was predictably negative; especially as many of them depended for their livelihood on one member of their family hawking in the streets from a barrow or horse and cart. In these cases, the competition from barrow boys was direct, even though they sometimes, especially in the Carlton Hill area, agreed not to pitch close to a greengrocer's.

What did the shopkeepers think of the barrow boys? Mrs. Wheatley: "Street traders would be all over the place -some would be down where the mackerel came in, some would carry soft fruit. Well, it was bad for the shopkeeper. If they came through Richmond Buildings with a barrow, they're selling stuff 2d. or 3d. a pound cheaper than the shops are -naturally that's going to hit the shop, isn't it?"

Lil Harriet: (shopkeeper, Sussex Street, early 1930's): "My husband went down to the market to buy, then we'd bring it up home and we'd sell. You'd have to dress that shop Friday for Saturday trade. But that same article the barrow boys would have on Saturday afternoon for half the price. Some, they'd sell up in Upper Gardner Street- it was all wrong."

Miss Bristow of Elm Grove saw less conflict in the situation and felt there was a common sympathetic understanding between the two sets of traders: "There used to be a lot of them, but there was a kind of sympathetic feeling that a barrow boy wouldn't stand outside a shop selling the same stuff. Like a fish barrow wouldn't stand outside a fish shop... It was a genuine kindness and friendship between traders. Didn't want to take each other's trade away. I often think it was very wrong. So much was said about it -having the barrow on the street -it's why they first started the Open Market. Well, that got out of proportion - different big firms got stalls there. It wasn't intended for that to begin with. It was intended for the men on the street. The stuff they brought down the market was stuff the shopkeepers had rejected."

Fred Howell has worked in the wholesale fruit and vegetable market for fifty years and had this to say about the barrow boys: "Well, they used to sell 'em things cheap. If we had anything left on Saturday -a lot of cabbage or sprouts. In the summer it was cherries... Well, I can understand it now -they had no overhead charges. They had their barrow and that's all they paid for -with the shopkeeper he had his overheads and men working for him. That's what upset them. But that's nothing to do with us. Shopkeepers always said they bought the rubbish. You see, you couldn't keep stuff over the week-end. There wasn't fridges like there is now. Then you had to sell it or it would go rotten by Monday... The barrow boys never used to interfere with the poorer shopkeeper- they used to go right away from them kind of shops. Never stopped outside the poor- Carlton Hill or anything like that- in fact, most of them lived in Carlton Hill, William Street. They never went outside shops- just on the corner of streets where there were shops. That's what annoyed the shopkeeper. I quite agree with them in a way. It isn't really right, them sticking right down the bottom of the street when the

shopkeepers had to pay rates and taxes.

THE MARKETS

Pressure from the police and the activities of the fly-pitchers led eventually to fixed pitches for bonafide barrow boys. The council hoped to fix the traders in one position where their activities could be surveyed. As well, direct competition with shopkeepers was reduced. Street life in many spheres seems to have been affected and limited at this time.

The Upper Gardner Street market continued as before and the open market eventually settled in Marshall's Row. But with the clamp-down on mobile street trading, demand for space in the markets increased. The limited number of allotted pitches excluded a great many barrow boys from authorised trading. Many risked prosecution by fly-pitching, while others struggled to get into the street markets.

Mr. Harry Cowley was well known as the defender of the barrow boys, though his management of the Upper Gardner Street market caused antagonism from some street traders who were refused entry to it. In 1959 his store was burnt down, supposedly by some of those excluded from the market. Henry Cowley deserves more study- perhaps a book of his own.

The barrow boys were extremely mobile, both geographically and socially. As the open market moved from Oxford Street after the First World War, to the Level, then to Marshall's Row, and on to its present position, it took with it some barrow boys who had pitches on these sites. Both Johnnie Stevens and Mr. Harding, a fishmonger, followed this route from barrow boy to the relative security of a position in the open market, virtually a shop-keeper. Mr. Harding recalled his beginnings:

"I first started in Oxford Street with my father after I left school. He was a navy man really, you see. He was called up. Before the war he worked in a fried fish shop: he used to muck about doing a bit of fishing. He used to clean fish."

"We were living in Claremont Row, in Sussex Street- until we got a little better off. Dad came out the navy and started up on his own in the market. In Oxford Street. Originally, this market was made for ex-servicemen only, see. I don't know if they paid anything for the stalls- I can't recollect it. It used to be a daily market and dad was in the middle with a fish barrow. We only had a little bar-row, it couldn't have been more than four foot or five foot long. Just a little thing to start off with. I used to go over and help him a bit- 'course it got a little busier and busier. So dad said, 'well, we'll make a little bit bigger stall'. So we made a bigger board, 8' by 10'."

How did he start off? "Same way as I did; with nothing. I went to the fishmarket- it was all credit. We had a good name and they wouldn't bother us for the money until the end of the week."

"He went down early mornings. You could go down 7:00 or 8:00 and get a stock if you wanted to, but it's always best to look around before that."

Why the fish trade? "Well, he knew about fish- he was always dangling in fish- how can you get out of it when you were dangling in it all the time! We done very well in Oxford Street. I was only a boy; I started when I was 14. I had to learn myself. He'd say, 'Here, cut its head off'. He never used to say anything if I done it wrong. I had to get another one to do. I had to learn, and I did learn."

"After a while they shifted us out of Oxford Street- I don't know if there were any complaints or what. Anyway they found us a place on the Level."

Who decided where you stood? "Well, in Oxford Street you more or less took your own pitches. You didn't argue about it, you just pitched there every day- same as on the Level. The corporation took over, over there- charge us so much per week."

Were you organised? "In a way- we had an association- if you can call it that. Some used to go through the street selling fish in barrows- they weren't barrow boys- they were classed as hawkers. Sunday morning they'd come round with herrings, shouting out. When the markets came, there weren't many left. We were tied- we just stood there. We weren't supposed to shout our wares out."

Were you better off than the hawkers? "Oh yes- we used to be all day there, didn't we? People came through there. We sold all kinds, see. We used to buy our fish down the fish market at about 8:30- we'd go and push the barrow. Dad used to- he didn't employ anyone. Somebody will always give you a push up the gap and out to the market- we used to have a big load on our barrow for the two of us, them times of day."

"I didn't take over from my father. I started on my own. I applied for a stall in the new market, I got married, see- there wasn't one available, not for awhile. Then they offered me a stall. My father and mother still carried on. Mother was there all the way through- she would serve and take the money. All the cleaning of fish was left to us. My sisters went down there once or twice."

What if you had fish unsold at the end of the day? "We never did have- we'd put a ticket on it till it did sell- we more or less could gauge what we wanted for a day. We could always buy ice from a fellow who came round. What little fish we had left we might take home. Or might take it round one or two houses on a plate- eight or nine plaice."

How did your father's business operate? "He'd get up and go down to buy the fish- out of there at 9:30 and get it on the stall. About half ten he'd say to mum, 'Fancy a livener'-down to the pub for a pint. They'd leave me there in the afternoon because most of the trade was in the morning- except Friday afternoon. The stall had to be taken down, put on the barrow- then the trestles and scales, and I had to push it up Richmond Street."

Did he prosper in business? "We were quite poor- he bought his own house in the end, though."

Has the market changed for good or bad? "It seems it's getting squeezed a lot; for you know, it's on a lease now. The original idea of the market was that it could sell cheaper, (good stuff, mind you) than the shopkeeper, so that poor people would benefit. It's not like that now. You go down the wholesale market, and ask, 'How much is that?'- 'Oh, 2s./6d.' Next one, 'How much is that?'- '2s./6d.' I don't know if they put their heads together. It's the same in the fruit game now."

Credit

Credit was of critical importance to the shop-keeper and his customers in all poor areas. Without such facilities, many families would have found great difficulty in matching all the essential expenditures with earnings. The intensity of competition was such that the working or artisan shopkeeper was more or less forced to give credit.

Credit-giving involved great risk for the shop-keeper. His fortunes and livelihood were bound up with those of his customers and the whole neighbourhood. Hard times hit him as much as anyone else. The death of a debtor or the laying off of the breadwinner was calamitous for the poorer shopkeepers. There was a fine line between being too free with credit and taking on too many bad debts, and not being free enough and losing custom as a result.

The poorer shopkeeper had to rely on the goodwill of his customers and trust that they would settle up at the end of the week. His judgement of dependability was critical to the success or failure of his venture: it was part of his skill. Credit-giving was a special problem for shopkeepers who had to pay cash for their stock, but even those who did have credit with wholesalers had to maintain confidence with regular cash payments.

The professional shopkeeper could afford to refuse credit to poorer customers or to supply it on stricter terms. He tended to trust middle class customers more readily. In some cases, interest was charged on credit accounts: this operated both as a deterrent and as a source of income.

Mrs. Wheatley:

Did you give credit? "Oh yes, you had to in those days. My mother had one customer- she had three or four boys. She was very poor- but every week she'd have 2s./6d. on the book and no more. And I remember one day my mum had some soft fruits, raspberries and red-currants and it was a time when they couldn't get them. So mother had them in her back room for what she called 'her customers'. Father said to her one day, 'Give your kiddies a treat- I've got some first class raspberries round the back. Would you like some?' She said, 'No, I can't afford it'. But she'd come up every Friday night with that half-crown. She would not go over her half-crown a week. It was a very hard-working family."

"My mother had one customer up in Grove Street- her bill went up to £2- she came in and said to mum, 'I can't afford to pay you this week'. Mother said, 'Why not? If you can't pay me £2 this week, how you going to pay me £4 next week out of the same wages?' She said to mum, 'How would you like to be the milkman. I owe him £7.' Mother said, 'Bigger fool him- you're not going to owe me £7'. She got half her money."

Fred Howell:

Did you give credit? "Oh yes, we had fisher people down there. They were very poor down there. There was a lot of people- they used to come up for 7s./6d. of coal and say, 'We'll give it to you Saturday'. 'Course, my mother used to let them have credit. Lot of 'em, she never got it back."

Lil Harriet was one of the poorest shopkeepers and had to pay cash to all her suppliers.

Did you give credit? "It all depended- I couldn't afford to let a lot of credit go- because for one thing I wouldn't have been able to pay my way. We paid cash to our suppliers. Suppose Mrs. This from over there came in and said she hadn't enough money; I'd say 'Take it'. I wouldn't give credit to new customers. I knew the people down in Sussex Street. I had one customer once- I knew her husband knew about it. So she said, 'I've got to pay the rent man.' It was down Kingswood Flats. So one morning, it was ever so bright- just after 5:00 in the morning- I took a box we had apples in and went outside of their door. I knocked on the door. He says, 'Oh Lil, what do you want ducks?' 'Oh, I've come because your wife tells me you've got the rent to pay and you won't be able to afford it.' Anyway I was still sitting there and all the people came out of their flats to go to work. Before he went to work, I had my money- but the rent man never had none that week. Oh no, let them do that sort of thing to people that can afford it, not when they know my husband's a sick man. Do you know, they respected me for it."

Clearly it was important for the poor shopkeeper to make an accurate assessment of credit-worthiness and to be persistent in collecting her debts.

Miss Bristow: Did you give credit? "Oh yes, only to people we knew. We had about ten, but we knew they were all right. Some of the women were not good managers - some of the men only gave their wives half of it. We knew they were genuine and if we asked their husbands, we knew they'd pay up. There was only one person - my father went round one evening and the man came to the door and my father said the bill hadn't been paid for a month and we knew she was in straits. The man pulled the money out of his pocket and told him not to let the woman have any more on credit. The woman hadn't been well - she had a lot of children. All came and paid after Dad died - I put a big notice up, 'All Credit to be Stopped' - I was closing down soon and I couldn't risk losing the money. A lot of shops were suffering in that way."

Mr. Grinyer told how credit was given on coal, a seasonal item of expenditure whose financial impact could be spread over the year. He suggested that he was compelled to give credit because his competitors did so. Did you give credit? "Oh yes, you had to in those days, you know. In the summer you had to fill the cellars up- so you gave credit and paid right through until they cleared that lot up. When they'd paid up, they got some more. They all gave credit, the other firms." Were there any problems? "Only moonlight flitters there used to be- never paid bills and slunk off and you never heard no more."

Mr. Hider, the baker and corn-merchant, seems to have considered bad debts to be part of his expenses. Did you give credit? "Only to those that were out of work- come on a bad time- be two or three months before you got your money back. You do get bad debts- can't help it- just forget it. A lot of people used to do it deliberate- several would come, run up a bill, pay a week or two, and wouldn't square up and we wouldn't see them again."

It wasn't necessary for the professional shop-keepers to give credit to sustain their custom, and therefore few did.

Mr. Stone: Did you give credit? "No. Well, I done credit, but in a system. I asked Mr. Colebrook of Reading- he was a gentleman who had 27 shops and he was the most learned man in the meat trade. I greatly admired him. I said, 'Excuse me sir, I'm going to take over a little tiny butcher shop, is there anything you could advise me on?' He said, 'Yes. The biggest thing that is the downfall of business is neglect. If you're going to run a business never give credit if you can avoid it. But you'll find it very difficult. You'll have a customer after two or three weeks, 'Can I have this, my husband's ill?' You've got to remember what she used to have- never give her what she's used to- give her less. If she had four portions, give her three. They're only too glad to get it. When that clock strikes midnight on the following Saturday and they haven't paid you, don't let them have anything else

until they bring the money. If they pay before 12:00, lend them for the next week but never over what you started with.' I told them this to their face and it was the finest thing I ever done- because you were where I wanted you. I'd say to Jack, 'Here, your missus hasn't paid- she owes me 3s./9d., I can't let her have any more.' So I kept it down. They all got to know."

It is interesting to note that the shopkeeper talked to the husband when debts fell due, as if he was the guardian of the family's respectability and credit-worthiness.

Mr. Archer was also loath to give credit: "We gave a bit. Not too much because it wasn't a good idea in those days. No need to give credit to local people. If they hadn't much money that day they'd ask for two pennyworth of pieces- then they'd get one penny of veg from the greengrocers. We called ours 'block ornaments', and they called theirs 'pot herbs'. For less than sixpence they could feed five or six people.

Shop as Social Centre

One noticeable feature of the poorer working shopkeeper's business was its social function. Shopping, though a chore, became a pleasurable and integrating activity in the neighbourhood. This social element was less evident in the professional shops.

Lil Harriet, for example, suggested that the social aspect of the shops was as important to her as the economic. What were your customers like? "They were rather good- well, how can I say it- they helped get my living, didn't they. They'd come and tell me if they had any troubles and I would tell them if I had any troubles. When my husband was in a bad way they all helped."

Was there a craft to shopkeeping? "I think it's personality. You either get on or go under. If you are not abrupt with people and listen to their tales of woe- you find it most tactful with the elderly people. You see, you talk to people- if you've got a shop you're only too pleased to, like if it's quiet. Mrs. This will come in and she'll say, 'I'll have this packet of soda or this or that- Do you know this about my daughter?' and off we'd go, and do you know, my life was spent listening about others and repeating it. My life went round on the shop- it made my life. Those were happy days- I only went out to weddings and funerals."

Were your customers friends? "No... well, they were all my friends. They were the kind of people- one would drop in Christmas morning with a drop of whisky, and say 'Drink this, I want my glass back, so drink it now'. All that lark. Right opposite there- Mrs. This is having a party and I'd go. A lot of my time was spent with customers. They might come in to stop a child crying and buy something- I'd give it an apple."

Was there a lot of gossip? "Yes. They would always talk about what was on their mind. I didn't mind- I had nothing else to do- I had only to dust my shelves or do a bit of booking."

Mrs. Wheatley recalled that, "Sometimes one or two would come in and have a chat with her mother- they'd be customers but wouldn't buy anything. My mother was friendly with everybody, she was well liked."

Elsie White has written of her father's news-agent in Southover Street in the 1930's: "During the light summer evenings the men would congregate in the shop, talking about the world at large, the good old days, gab sessions, harmless enough. At weekends they would be in the local pubs, but money only ran to fags and a natter at old Joe's mid-week."

Miss Bristow also had fond memories of her customers: "Oh, they were nice people. They'd help- and in illness if they were making a meat pudding, they'd bring in enough for us to have. Those that were the poorest, they were the kindest. They'd get vouchers- say, for a gallon of flour- well, they'd bring the vouchers to Dad- he picked out all the special fruit and gave them- he'd give them marge or a bit of parsley- he was very good. Dad used to stand on the steps smoking his pipe and everyone passing used to speak. Never would anyone pass without speaking. If they had any difficulty with money or anything like that they'd come and ask Dad's advice- and if he could he'd tell them about money and the cost of things. They knew I was in an office and if they had any difficult letters to write, they'd come and ask if I'd draft them out a letter. They were always grateful.

Mr. Archer recalled a newsagent in Richmond Buildings who performed another sort of neighbourhood service. "Then there was Harry Croydon, the newsagent, who had been there all his life. His two sons worked with him. He had the delivery of papers there. Nobody else would go anywhere near him. He took bets in under the counter where the police wouldn't get them. The bookies' runners, as they called them- if you came for your newspapers you'd slip your bets in. If you wanted to bet on a horse or dog, you had to find somebody to take it. People like him would give it to a proper bookie. Bookies were few and far between. You collected your winnings there afterwards."

Thus the shop functioned as a citizens advice bureau, gossip exchange, information centre and betting office. Some shopkeepers were also money lenders. Distrust of doctors, as well as inability to afford their fees, encouraged many to go to the chemist for advice and home remedies: it was a form of community health centre.

Mrs. O'Flinn's shop was an example of this aspect of shopkeeping: "They don't come in so much to chat- though most of the people who come here seem to

know one another. I usually say, 'How's your dad?, How's your mother?, How's your kids?' They come in to me for all their ailments up here. 'Look at those spots': they wouldn't dream of asking in Boots. 'Tell me if I have got to go to the doctor's'. You do get that in this area, you see. In the early days, we used to get that more than now, because there wasn't the National Health Service. We used to have a lot of people come in, with burns, and I used to say, 'Come in to-morrow and I'll re-dress it.' I became a semi-doctor. You had to rely entirely on building up your reputation."

Mr. Stanger had the some experience: "In our early days, people used to come in to us and say, 'I've got a pain in the chest- can you make me up something?' They'd say, 'I'd sooner come to you, you're better than a doctor'."

Was the shop a social centre? "No... they would gossip, though. There were two women once, gossiping on the pavement by the doorway. They'd been there an hour. So I said to the boy, 'Albert!' 'Yes, Mr. Stanger?' 'Go out and shake the mat'. He said, 'But there are a couple of women out there'. I said, 'That's what I want you to shake the mat for'- they were soon off." What did they gossip about? "Families mostly". Did you get involved? "Oh definitely yes- it was part of our job."

The professional shopkeepers acted as advisors and councillors in order to build up a professional reputation and to attract local patronage. As Mr. Stanger's story of the gossips suggests, however, they were more reluctant to allow visits for the sole purpose of meeting and talking with neighbours. Elsie Whyfe recalled that: "My parents would never have that door closed, winter or summer. 'An open door is an invitation to custom', quoth Dad. 'A closed door only encourages gossip and loitering', quoth Mum."

Although many shopkeepers became involved with customers and their problems, and shared an interest in local gossip, this local involvement had its limits. Shopkeeping families did very little visiting amongst customers and restricted their social calls to relatives. Elsie Whyfe wrote: "The back parlour I have mentioned time and time again in this story. It was the focal point of our lives, and the room where friends and customers would sometimes sit around and discuss their problems and joys. We were never too friendly with customers, I suppose because if one was openly more friendly with one than the other a kind of jealousy could set in."

These limitations restricted the social life of shopkeepers, as Miss Bristow's experience suggests: Did your father have many friends? "No. We kept ourselves to ourselves." Why? "I don't know. Dad always kept his business to himself."

Fred Howell's family experience was similar: What did your father and mother do in their spare time? "Well, my mother would go up to her sister in Nelson Place two or three times a week to have a chat. Me dad used to go to the pictures over

the Court in New Road- Sundays mostly." Did he go to church? "No, he wasn't all that strict on church. But we were all Church of England, all of us, and we believed in it, if you understand my meaning." Did they go to the pub? "No, father used to have all his indoors, and my mother. I've been over the pub to get half pint for the evening many a time. They never used to go out to pubs, neither of them." Most of Mr. Howell's acquaintances appear to have been business contacts: "...he used to know only the people in the street and Carlton Hill- the trades-people and a lot of people down the market."

Mrs. Wheatley's family also appears to have had a restricted social circle: What did your father do in his spare time? "He was never hardly in as soon as the pubs were open. Used to go to one in Albion Hill- I don't know where else he went." Did he have friends? "No- unless he met them at a pub." Did he go visiting? "No, he was a poor visitor, my father." Did anyone visit you? "No, not much." Did your mother visit people in their own homes? "Oh no. She didn't believe in becoming that familiar with them. It's likely to cause jealousy."

The marginal shopkeeper could not afford to risk the loss of even one customer by showing any favouritism or social exclusiveness. Wartime rationing posed particular problems for such shopkeepers, who wished to reward faithful customers by supplying them with 'short goods', without appearing to be unfair to newer customers. Clearly shopkeepers were restricted in their social activities because of the high degree of competition in their business.

The professional shopkeeper looked beyond the neighbourhood to find his social circle, perhaps due to his higher relative social status. Mr. Archer senior, Mr. Stone senior and Mr. Stanger belonged to trade or professional associations. Mr. Archer was also a Freemason, while Mr. Stanger was a leading member of the Boy Scouts. Mr. Stone's father was a keen follower of horse racing and boxing, pursuits which took him to London and the racecourses.

The O'Flinn's also reflect this limited involvement in neighbourhood socializing: Do you belong to any associations and clubs? "Well, we belong to the Pharmaceutical Society and Notional Pharmaceutical Union." Anything local? "No, I don't. Peter (her son) belongs to the Catenians, which is of course the Catholic businessman's club." Did you go to the pub? "No, we don't go to pubs. We used to go out for a meal." How about friends? "Oh no, I don't have any friends much around here at all." Why not? "Well, we were in business, you see. Mostly because my husband belonged to the Catenians, so the friends we had came from there." When your husband was alive did you go visiting? "Not very much. Not a lot; not around here. I came from Nottingham and most of my friends and relatives are up there. We've been down here for about forty years."

Conclusion

We cannot speak of a single class of shopkeepers, but rather of three distinct types.

The professional shopkeeper was often trained by apprenticeship. His business was large and assistants were employed to carry out specialised duties. He often belonged to a professional trade association, and was a substantial and respected pillar of the community, a local councillor or magistrate.

The working shopkeeper ran a smaller enterprise, based on borrowed capital and family labour. Unlike the professional shopkeepers, many working shopkeepers were women. Customers were not separated from the shopkeeper by a wide social gap, and they were welcome to use the shop as a social centre.

The barrow boy operated the riskiest business of all, usually living a hand-to-mouth existence. Both of the other types of retailers resented his price-cutting activities, by which he made his precarious living.

All these traders have declined. Street traders with their street cries have almost disappeared; the few that remain are congregated into markets. The small craftsman shopkeeper- the shoemaker, tailor, and locksmith- have gone too.

Large supermarkets and multiples in central shopping districts have attracted away the local custom. This change may have contributed to greater efficiency and lower prices, but it has completely altered the meaning of shopping. Where people once went 'round the corner for a packet of tea and a cosy chat, they now join the queue of strangers in a supermarket. Instead of the daily trips to the corner store, we now go to the supermarket once a week. Some go to the hypermarket once a month! Goods have become identified by brand names and advertising which influence consumer choice. Most goods are pre-packaged by the manufacturers, displacing the skills of the professional shopkeeper, who concentrated more on service to their regular customers.

The small local shop served a social purpose in providing a focus for neighbourhood life. The few that remain still carry on this tradition, but today shopping has lost many of its social faces, and has become simply buying. This book will hopefully point the way to further studies of shops and shopping. There are many more shopkeepers whose recollections are worth collecting. Also, how have the people who are customers reacted to these changes in their neighbourhood? Clearly the work on this important facet of everyday life is only beginning.