

SHOPPING © by Hilary Dyson

The development of the shopping parades in our area began with the building up of the street system and of course with the coming of better transport, enabling more people to live in the area and work in the centre of Leeds. The two are very much associated. Before the purchase of the Nicholson estate and the fledgling public park, the area was very sparsely built up. In 1893 the population of Roundhay was only 962, mainly families living in grand houses with attendant workers living in cottages in the grounds. The chief method of travel for the wealthy was by their own carriages and there are still coach houses to be seen, now disguised as garages. There was, however, a public omnibus which operated between Leeds and the old entrance to the park on Wetherby Road and an electric tramcar every ten minutes between Sheepscar and Roundhay, the journey then taking 20 minutes.

There were very few shops with large glass windows and many things on display. A journey into Leeds was necessary for any of the finer things of life. Most of the commercial premises were concerned with country pursuits like farming or gardening. From the 1840's, there was a public house "Gipton Wood Inn", then much nearer to the roadside. Today it is called the Roundhay. A wheelwright and a blacksmith were essential for the maintenance of the many carriages and horses. In those days ladies of quality did not go into town and shop with the ordinary public. Instead there were two dressmakers who would bring samples of the latest materials and styles from London and Paris into your home.

There was a chemist's shop on the south side of the Parade built by T.I. Preston in 1898. He must have been very successful and enterprising. You can still see his initials on the building. There was also a very early Post Office at first in a wooden building and later in the splendid stone building still there in 2001, as an Estate Agents at the corner of Oakwood Lane.

By 1901, things were beginning to change. More houses had been built and now more people required better shopping facilities. The London City and Midland Bank, a bootmaker and a fish and game dealer were established. By 1907 George Nettleton, a builder, was very busy developing the housing estate behind Roundhay Road. Staines the grocer had a very good reputation for the quality of his goods and the service to his customers. There was a furniture shop, a draper, painter and plumber.

In 1912 Roundhay and Oakwood were annexed by Leeds City and this brought more people to live in the area. The north side of the Parade did not develop until the 20's, the land being in private ownership till then. In 1925 Henry Lax was given planning permission to build a parade of shops. These were obviously smaller than those on the south side, but they had gardens behind and living accommodation above. There was a police station then situated at the end of Soldier's Field. A Post Office was run by Edwin Firth and there were several schools in the area. A gent's outfitter and another chemist were established. In 1927 a motor engineer, George Campbell, was in residence to service the increasing mechanised transport.

By the 1940's a dentist was available to look after your teeth and a ladies and gents hairdresser. Joan Peacock, a dancing teacher (a sure sign of affluence) and a private gentlemen's club were established over the end shop on the south side.

Mr Preston, the chemist, retired in the 1930's and Wilf Spencer took on the business until 1945, to be followed by Gordon Blight. Mr. Blight rented the property which was quite extensive having large living accommodation above the shop. He paid £3 a week rent. The shop remained much the same, till Mr. Blight retired in 1987. Mr. Blight had eventually bought the shop from Mr. Preston's son and it was again sold, including the beautiful Honduras mahogany fixtures and fittings. During an interview with Mr. Blight he reminisced about his time in the shop and his many interesting customers. One wealthy lady used to send her chauffeur to collect her orders. During the very cold winter of 1947 the best seller, not surprisingly, was hot water bottles. A lovely story he told me concerned a local farmer who wished to buy his wife a bottle of perfume for Christmas. After much deliberation he selected a bottle of Worth perfume called Je Reviens. On enquiring if he understood the French name the farmer said, "No". So when he learnt that it meant "I will return" and on reflecting the price, he exclaimed "I bloody well will if it isn't right!". Many people will remember Willey, who delivered medicine ordered from Mr. Blight. There were three chemists at one time, Timothy Whites & Taylors, as well as Mr. Norton next door to the Woodland Cottages.

Nowadays, Oakwood Parade serves the shopping public very successfully, though many people regret that the only chemist now is in the Tesco store. A recognised factor in the success of the Parade is the availability of good parking, though there is not enough to please everyone. Another vital ingredient is personal service.

Today (September 2001) there is a very good mix of shops with something for everyone. There are banks, building societies, estate agents, dress shops, a book shop, a library, jewellers shops, an art shop, Post Office, newspaper shop, hairdressers, a health food shop, supermarket, off-licence, electrical goods, greengrocer, flower shop, dentist, solicitor, doctor's surgery and a tailor. This variety means that whatever the time of day there are always people around. Personal service is important to a lot of local people and the interaction between neighbours out shopping is another factor in the success of the Parade. The appearance of the Parade is also vital. The shop windows are attractive and colourful. Travel agents entice people to make foreign journeys. We are fortunate to have a very unusual fish bar which has been there for some years, being originally a fresh fish and fruiterer run by Rowland Wilson, then by Garside and Pearson as a fried fish shop. The frontage was altered in the late 30's. It is now a listed building and boasts a shop front of vitriolite, metal and glass with the lower segments acid-etched and sand blasted to represent waves. The frieze has "Fish Bar" neon lettering. The presence of several restaurants and coffee bars brings more people to the area.

In our publications we hope to recall past shops and note also newer businesses. I have been lucky to have been offered the story of the development of one of our largest retail shops that of "Jones of Oakwood" (published here, see the next essay), and a memory of a smaller but just as important shop "Upper Crust". The story of the bread shop, originally Perkins, was very much tied up with that of a local girl, Jeanne Wrigglesworth. Jeanne's story began on the south side of the city where she was brought up in a small but happy family. Jeanne has memories of her upbringing and taking her young brother to school, sometimes carrying him on her back. On leaving school she started an apprenticeship with Burton's tailoring firm. She completed her training there, though not without some opposition from her parents, who were concerned that tailoring would not suit her temperament. They were right, but Jeanne stuck to her guns and finished the long and often arduous training. She still uses her skills even today.

After finishing her time at Burtons, Jeanne decided to try and improve her situation in life by taking a course at Bradford College (as it was then). This would enable her to take a position with the Social Services. In those days you had to pay to do further study and it was not easy to raise the money. The only way Jeanne could pay for this was to take a part-time job to provide the funds for the part-time study course. So Jeanne began working at Perkins shop in Harehills, having moved to this side of the city. She showed aptitude for selling and this did not go unnoticed. Very soon her boss picked her out for further management training.

Now Jeanne had to make a decision. Should she take the steps to complete her course and finish working at the bread shop? Or should she accept the offer of the managerial situation after a period of further training for Perkins? Much heart searching took place and eventually, after consultation with her family, she decided to continue with Perkins and moved to the shop at Oakwood. Business expanded due to her diligence and she was very happy being able to implement many of her own ideas.

However, in business nothing stands still and time came for a change in the fortunes of Perkins. Supermarkets were sweeping in and Perkins decided to supply them direct and close their retail shops down. This was a blow to Jeanne and could have meant the loss of her job if someone else bought the business. This was when the bank manager stepped in and advised Jeanne to take the plunge and take the business on herself. Her family were right behind her and with their backing she invented the name "Upper Crust". Of course, bread was the main item sold at Perkins along with cakes, scones and sandwiches of all sorts. The new name, however, conjured up visions of the baker taking the hot bread from the oven and the delicious aroma wafting through the house. In fact the name goes back to the Middle Ages when bread was baked over the embers of a hot fire. Often the bottom part of the loaf would be burnt and only the top or upper crust was fit for the better class people. The name attracted more trade to the shop and Jeanne did well. When she eventually decided to sell out and retire, she made a good profit and was well satisfied.

Jeanne has deserved her retirement. Although she takes life at a slower pace than formerly, she still uses her talents in helping her family and many friends and also in helping to organise the Women's Meeting of Roundhay Methodist Church. She is also treasurer to our Society, Oakwood and District Historical Society.

In compiling this article and the following one on Jones's, I am indebted to Marilyn Joyce who did much research and took photographs. I am thankful for interviews with Mr. Blight and many local people including Thelma Lisle and Barbara Clark (nee Norton) and of course Jones. I also made use of local Directories.