

Chesterfield & District Local History Society

HISTORY PAPER NO. 3.

TITLE: CHESTERFIELD'S MONSTER CAKES

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Over the Christmas and New Year's editions of 1924 - 1925, the Derbyshire Times published the reminiscences of Alderman Henry Dronfield. His recollections provide readers with descriptions of the character, activities and atmosphere of Chesterfield's town centre and Market around 1850.

Besides mentioning the bow-fronted shops surrounding the market square with its railings painted white, he also recalled, through the eyes and senses of a young boy, the excitement caused in the town by the monster cakes created in the premises of Mr. John Poole, a confectioner on Low Pavements at the bottom of the Market Square.

The origin, development and rapid growth of these Colossal Christmas Cakes, which could also be named the "Luscious Lottery Leviathans of Low Pavements" are described in adverts and features in the Derbyshire Courier and Derbyshire Times from 1853 - 1856.

The extracts from these local newspapers and the wording and descriptions in the columns and advertisements also provide interesting insights into the activities of tradesmen and towns-people of the time. They are also examples of journalistic writing in the mid 19th century when embellishment and exaggeration were very common. The extracts are presented in chronological order so that readers can see the sequence, story and atmosphere unfold year by year.

Despite the tendency towards exaggeration by Victorian tradesmen, it may be that Mr. John Poole of Low Pavements, Chesterfield, did make "The Biggest Cake in the World."

No reports of monster cakes in Chesterfield after 1856 have been found.

"Derbyshire Courier" - Saturday 10th January 1852

TWELFTH NIGHT - The confectioners' shops in Chesterfield were brilliantly illuminated and beautifully decorated on the twelfth night but at only one of them was there a distribution of cakes; the first prize valued at £1-17s fell to the lot of Mr. Rooth, butcher; the second, value 17s, was gained by Mr. Busby, solicitor.

"Derbyshire Courier" - Saturday January 8th 1853

TWELFTH NIGHT - The confectioners' shops in Chesterfield presented a very beautiful aspect on Thursday night, from the decorations with which they were embellished. Mr. Reynolds had a distribution of cakes by ticket and the prizes were proved to be as follows. First, value £1-1s, Mr. James Newton, Cavendish Street; second value £1-1s, Mr. S. Shepley at Messrs Claughtons; third value 14s-6d, Miss Ann Salt, Cutthorpe. The number of subscribers was 276.

"Derbyshire Courier" - Saturday 17th December 1853

CHRISTMAS ANTICIPATIONS - A confectioner in Chesterfield, apprehensive that the rebellion of the grocers against the ancient custom of bestowing candles upon their customers at Christmas, may be productive of some of the evils of civil war, has advertised a counteracting agency. The connection between bridal rings and wedding cakes most people understand or can easily imagine and in order to make the unison more general and diffusive "the man of sweets" offers to distribute a cake of colossal proportions, in the depths of which eight magical rings are to be concealed - hoping to divert into a luscious channel any irascibility which the grocers' strike may evoke. "Those about to marry will do well to make assurance doubly sure by an investment which will secure them several slices.

GOOD NEWS FOR THE LADIES.

COMPENSATION FOR THE LOSS OF CHRISTMAS CANDLES!!

J. POOLE, Confectioner, Low Pavement, Chesterfield, has provided a monster **BRIDE-CAKE**, weighing upwards of 1 cwt., in which he has placed eight gold wedding rings, of exquisite workmanship; to be distributed, on Christmas Eve, at 1s per lb.

"Derbyshire Courier" Saturday December 10th 1853

ABOLITION of CHRISTMAS BOXES.

WE, the undersigned, Grocers and Tea Dealers of Chesterfield, respectfully inform the Public, that at a Meeting held on the 9th December, 1853, it was unanimously resolved, that owing to the increase of Competition and the consequent reduction of Profit, the practice of giving Candles, or other Goods as **CHRISTMAS-BOXES**, to our Wholesale and Retail Customers, should be discontinued, and thus put a stop to a Custom which has proved a serious burden to the Tradesmen, without giving a corresponding advantage to the Public.

James Lingard
William Wilson
James Woodhead
George Sedgwick
James Allen
James Bunting
Daniel Hall
William Moore
Josiah Elliott
David Gladwin

John Frith
Joseph Rainforth
Charles Clark
John Marsden
John Batteson
John Furniss
Lewis Shaw
G. F. Taylor
Joseph Woodhead

"Derbyshire Courier" - Saturday 31st December 1853

RACE FOR WEDDING CAKE - Mr. Poole's large wedding cake, weighing two cwt and containing eight gold rings, was in such extensive demand on Saturday last, as to be cut up in the course of two hours - such was the rush for the spicy material - such the thirst for gold. A second cake of five cwt, with twelve rings is now advertised for sale.

WEDDING CAKE AND RINGS FOR THE PEOPLE.

IN consequence of the demand exceeding the supply for **J. POOLE'S MONSTER WEDDING CAKE** on Christmas Eve, he has determined to make another splendid **CAKE**, weighing 5 cwt., and place within it **TWELVE GOLD RINGS**, of the best workmanship.

To be Sold at 1s a pound on **TWELFTH DAY** and the day following, **SATURDAY, January 7.**

Low Pavement, Chesterfield, Dec. 29th.

POOLE'S LEVIATHAN CHRISTMAS CAKE - This monster cake, which has been undergoing the operation of "baking" for the last fortnight, is now completed and may be seen, along with the respective prizes, at Mr. Poole's shop, Low Pavement. It is a perfect curiosity in itself, and will amply repay a visit. The cake will be cut for sale on Friday next.

THE CHESTERFIELD CAKE.

J. POOLE'S THIRD EXTRAORDINARY DISTRIBUTION OF CAKE!!

THE great numbers who could not procure the above Article last year, when Nine Hundred-weight was provided, containing 20 Gold Wedding Rings, has induced J. P. to manufacture, at great cost, a CAKE weighing upwards of ONE TON, which will contain Cases enclosing TICKETS for FIFTEEN Splendid Silver-plated TEA-POTS, value £2 each; and TWO New Elegant SILVER WATCHES, value £3 10s each.

The Proprietor guarantees these Articles of the first make, being from the manufactory of Messrs. Broadhead and Co., Silver-platers, of Sheffield, and made expressly for this occasion. The Watches are purchased of Mr. Barnes, Watchmaker, Beetwell-street, Chesterfield, who warrants them keeping time 12 months, and will be responsible for their not doing so.

At this festive season, when all endeavour to keep up a Merry Christmas, the above distribution will give a chance of obtaining a substantial Prize, as well as a Superior Article in Christmas Cake.

The Cake will be sold at ONE SHILLING per POUND, and will commence on FRIDAY, the 22nd, and during the week following, until all is disposed of. The Cake will be ready for inspection during the previous week.

For the satisfaction of the public, Mr. P. will keep a list of the fortunate holders of prizes.

Parties at a distance may obtain a cut of the above, by sending a remittance for the quantity required to Mr. J. POOLE, Confectioner, Low-Pavement, and Burlington-street, Chesterfield.

Just received a large Assortment of Ornaments for Christmas trees, chandeliers, wax lights, &c., &c., &c.

PREPARATIONS FOR CHRISTMAS - The prosperity which has characterised the mineral trade of this part of the county, will enable the inhabitants of Chesterfield and the neighbourhood to enjoy the festivities of Christmas with greater zest than in those manufacturing towns where the war and other concurrent causes have tended so much to depress the industrial arts. Already preparations have been made for the advent of Christmas. The grocers, confectioners and other tradesmen have decorated their windows with the olive and other ornaments emblematical of the joyous season.

Mr. Poole, the leviathan cake manufacturer, has commenced digging into the ribs of his monster of the sweets.

CHRISTMAS AT CHESTERFIELD - As we stated last week both the large cakes manufactured by Mr. Poole and Mr. Reynolds, confectioners, were eagerly bought by the public. On Saturday afternoon both the huge specimens of confectionery were sold and the great majority of prizes claimed.

CHRISTMAS AT CHESTERFIELD - What pleasurable recollections are associated with Christmas! How jovial and joyous are the feelings that pervade the human breast at the approach of Christmas time! when friends meet friends, and hearts beat joyously, and love laughs smilingly round the family circle. If we may judge, however, by the preparations making in Chesterfield, which are usual at this season, we should be inclined to believe that in spite of the war and increased taxation, the means of enjoyment will not be limited.

The articles so temptingly displayed in the windows of the retail tradesmen are emblematical of the season, most of them being decorated with holly branches and quite full of foreign fruits and spices, forcibly reminding us of our great Christmas puddings. Then again we have the great monster cake lotteries which this year have been patronised to an incredible extent. The fact of one individual (Mr. Poole) stocking his shop with a cake weighing two tons, and containing £63 worth of prizes would have been, some years ago, thought a remarkable incident in trade. He has this year placed over his shop a device, in the form of a star, on each side of which are the initial letters (V.N.) of her Majesty Queen Victoria and the Emperor Napoleon, which has a pretty effect. Mr. Reynolds, confectioner, has also manufactured a splendid large cake, and both his and Mr. Poole's are profusely ornamented. Yesterday both cakes were diminishing rapidly, and we have no doubt the whole quantity will soon be sold.

THE CHESTERFIELD CAKE FOR 1855.

THE FIFTH DISTRIBUTION.

THE unprecedented and extraordinary demand for the CHRISTMAS CAKES hitherto manufactured by Mr. JOHN POOLE, has produced for him far-famed renown for quality, richness of flavour, &c., and having sold last season the great weight of ONE TON AND A HALF, he intends this year to surpass his former efforts and produce one that will be the largest and best cake ever made in the world, being

THE ENORMOUS WEIGHT OF TWO TONS!

In which will be enclosed cases containing Tickets for

ONE HUNDRED PRIZES

as follows:	£	s	d.
1 Patent Lever SILVER WATCH, jewelled in 4 holes, warranted by Mr. Robinson, maker, valued at	5	5	0
1 Handsome Set of Mahogany Drawers, may be seen at Mr. G. Shilwell's, cabinet maker.	4	0	0
20 splendid chased Silver-plated Tea-pots (new design,) makers, Urquhart and Co. Silver Platers, Sheffield	30	0	0
17 sets of 6 each Table Knives and Forks, self tip. balance, maker H. Morton, cutler, Chesterfield.	5	19	0
60 lbs of Superfine Tea, in 1 lb packets, supplied by Mr. J. Woodhead, Low Pavement	15	0	0
1 sack of superfine flour, 18 stones	3	0	0

100 Prizes Total Value £3 4 0

Irrespective of the high prizes now charged for all the articles to make a cake of this quality, the price will be as before, ONLY ONE SHILLING PER POUND.

To commence cutting on Friday the 21st of December, and continue until the whole is disposed of. This Wonderful Cake may be viewed a week previous to the day of sale.

J. POOLE pledges himself that he will only make ONE CAKE this season.

The following persons who have obtained prizes can be referred to:-

Mr. G. Parvin, Sheffield	Mr. E. Mason, Chesterfield.
Mrs. Wright, Terrace.	Mr. Whitehead, Chesterfield.
Mrs. Cooper, Bradford	
Mrs. Henthote, Newbold,	Mrs. Peach, Chesterfield.
Miss Milner, Birmingham.	Miss Hill, Cardwell, near
Mrs. Esther Blake, Cut-	Holmesfield.
thorpe, near Chesterfield.	Mrs. West, Leeds, York
Mrs. Scott, Brampton.	shire.
Miss Berry, Chesterfield.	Mr. W. Barker, miner, Ca-
Mr. J. Wood, miner.	low.
Mr. College, Chesterfield.	Mr. G. Pearson, Ault Huck-
Mr. G. Wragg, Chesterfield.	hall, near Hardwick.
Mr. W. Bradshaw, Brampton	Mr. Farnsworth, William
moor.	thorpe.

Parties at a distance may obtain a Cut of the above, by sending a remittance for the quantity required to Mr. JOHN POOLE, Confectioner, Low Pavement and Burlington-street, Chesterfield.

All Post Office Orders punctually attended to. [110]

Instead of talking at this festive season of huge oxen, with their ponderous loads of superincumbent fat, the whole absorbing topic of conversation, among the younger portion of the community especially, is the large cakes which have been ammounced for distribution in our quiet borough, containing an amount of prizes which could have been a considerable accession to Croesus's astonishing accumulation of wealth, could he have secured a portion of the treasures contained within the substance of their body corporate. Patent lever silver watches, handsome mahogany sets of drawers, splendidly chased silver-plated teapots, sets of table knives and forks, packets of tea and bags of flour, figure among the attractions which each purchaser of a pound of the Christmas compound of flour, currants and spices, is expecting to fall to his or her share. These monster cakes seem peculiarly to claim Chesterfield as their centre of attraction, as we do not hear of their attaining to such goodly dimensions in other places as they do here.

One purveyor of these tiny specimens of schoolboy amenities informs us that last season he sold ONLY a ton and a half of the commodity, but this year he intends to surpass all his former efforts and "produce the largest and best made cake ever made in the world", far exceeding in ponderosity the celebrated equine specimen belonging to Major Bluster so well known in this locality some years back, being "of the enormous weight of two tons!"

Freighted with the dazzling treasures above enumerated "Poole's giant cake" is of circular shape, being six feet six inches in diameter, and three feet four inches in height, giving us a solidity of 110 and six-tenths cubic feet, or upwards of four cubic yards, a quantity sufficient to fill nearly three railway earth-wagons; whilst the external area of the cylindrical figure amounts to 13 and four-tenths superficial feet, or nearly fifteen square yards.

The number of applicants for a shilling's worth of this Christmas adventure, from quarters far and near, has, we hear, been large beyond expectation, and it is probable that ere tonight has closed upon us, most of the cake and prizes will have passed into the hands of the anxious expectants who have staked their shillings in hopes of securing a share of the many attractive articles contained in the lottery.

The second cake has been manufactured by Mr. J. Reynolds, confectioner, High Street, which also has handsome prizes, embracing swing kettle, with lever stand and lamp; Britannia metal teapots and amounting to a very respectable sum in value. This also is of respectable dimensions, measuring eleven feet six inches in circumference and it is two feet four inches in height, containing a solidity of twenty-four and a half feet.

We understand that the applicants from a distance have been so numerous for the cakes that there will be but a small portion left for those customers who have not given their orders.

On Thursday the cakes were dressed in a most tasteful manner, and when fully exposed to view, had a most attractive appearance. A large crowd gathered in front of Mr. Poole's shop where a gas star, with jets and the letters VR" suspended were burning and formed a conspicuous object at the lower side of the market place.

Mr. Reynold's cake is said to be of most excellent quality and for fine symmetry and finish was much admired. It weighed nearly 12 cwt. Its co-partner for cake honours is estimated to weigh nearly 45cwt. So wide a celebrity have these Christmas cakes obtained that orders for a cut of them have been received from all parts of the kingdom.

"Derbyshire Courier" - Saturday 27th December 1856

HOAXING A PURCHASER OF POOLE'S CAKE - A shameful hoax has been practised this week upon a person residing at Skegby, near Mansfield, who had purchased a small portion of the great Chesterfield Christmas cake. A wag who had contrived to get possession of the cake purchased by the Skegbyite, inserted in it a lead about the size of the regular tickets, which was bent up. On an examination of the cake the lucky purchaser, elated with success, opened the ticket on which was written "A Fat Pig". The purchaser's joy knew no boundaries on reading his lucky prize, which is the most valuable one in all the distribution. Unable to rest, he at once determined to secure his prize, and forthwith procured a horse and cart and secured the assistance of two men, who accompanied him from Skegby to Chesterfield. They decorated the horse's head with "a bonny blue ribbon" and on their way

to Chesterfield they had liberal potations of heavy wet to celebrate their luck. On arrival at Chesterfield the fortunate holder of the ticket went to Mr. Poole's establishment with a joyful countenance and a swaggering gait, threw a ticket on the counter and said, "Well, mester, I've come for't tiger (pig)". It was soon discovered that the ticket was not a genuine one, and for further satisfaction he was referred to Mr. Morton the cutler, Burlington Street, who also attempted to convince the astonished man that he had been cruelly hoaxed.

THE CHESTERFIELD CAKE FOR 1856.

THE SIXTH ANNUAL SALE.

THE extraordinary and unprecedented demand for the CHRISTMAS CAKE hitherto made by Mr. JOHN POOLE, having secured for him the confidence of the public of Chesterfield and the principal Towns in the Midland Counties, he ventures this year to surpass his former efforts by making the Largest and Best Cake ever made in the World! which will be of the Enormous Weight of

UPWARDS OF THREE TONS!

Along with the sale of it will be distributed (as in past sales), 107 GIFTS, value £93 14s. 0d., consisting of the following viz. :—

	£	s.	d.
A splendid Fat Pig (alive) value.	8	8	0
Fed expressly for the occasion, by Mr. G Bollington, farmer, Ashover-Milltown, and may be seen in Chesterfield Cattle Market, on Saturday, Dec. 20th, or previous, at the Wash Farm, Ashover.			
4 Patent Lever Silver Watches, value.	16	10	0
Guaranteed by the Makers—No. 1, Mr. Robinson, No. 2, Mrs. Thompson, No. 3, Mr. Mee, No. 4, Mr. Slack.			
1 Handsome set of Mahogany Drawers, circular fronts, value	5	0	0
May be seen at Mr. Shaw's, Cabinet Maker.			
70 lbs. of Superfine Tea, at 5s. per lb. value	17	10	0
1 Bag of Superfine Flour (18 stones) value	2	10	0
30 Beautifully chased Silver-plated Tea Pots	13	10	0
107 Gifts. Total Value. £93 14 0			

The recipients of Last Year's Gifts were publicly advertised, and a copy of the same may be had by any one enclosing a Postage Stamp with their address. The Cake will be Sold at

ONE SHILLING PER POUND!!

To commence selling on THURSDAY, the 18th of DECEMBER, and will be on view the Saturday previous, December 13th, 18th.

N.B.—Parties at a distance wishing to obtain a cut of the above, are particularly requested to make early applications, as last year Mr. P. was put to much inconvenience and loss in returning orders and remittances, which did not arrive in time. Post Office Orders, &c., promptly attended to, if addressed to Mr. JOHN POOLE, Confectioner, Low pavement, and Burlington-street, Chesterfield.