

Chesterfield & District Local History Society

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WHO LIVED ON LOW PAVEMENT, CHESTERFIELD?

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Many of the census of population recorders followed a route and sequentially recorded the households along a street. But not all were quite as methodical. It is not therefore possible to be absolutely certain that because entries follow one another the householders enumerated were neighbours. The 1891 census for Low Pavement, Chesterfield, however, does give a strong impression that the census officer was meticulously systematic and the juxtaposition of businesses can reasonably be deduced. They can then be fleshed out from trade directories and old photographs. It was in this way that this picture of one of the boundaries of the market square was put together.

Low Pavement ran along the south side of the market place and had been there, though with a different name, from the thirteenth century. At its Brampton end, it finished just beyond what is now the Portland Hotel, across the road from the big house now occupied by Shipton Hallewell, a firm of solicitors. The first building in the street was the White Horse Inn, where a century ago John Sydall was the landlord. An entry alongside led into the long court called White Horse Yard that ran right down to the river Hipper, and contained the inn stabling and a big trough at which horses could drink. There were a great number of these yards, each separated from its neighbour and accessed only off Low Pavement. They were really very like long narrow, alley, cul-de-sacs often with houses and workshops closely packed on each side. This first yard housed thirteen families in the census year.

The Inn and the house were pulled down just at the end of the century to make way for the Portland Hotel, built to accommodate passengers using the newly constructed Lancashire, Derbyshire and East Coast Railway.

Two residential houses, occupied by the families of Jacob Radford and Edward Ketton separated the White Horse from another public house, the Bird in Hand which also had behind it a large yard with stable buildings. From here the local carters operated, Mr Fetherstone delivering to Walton, Ashover and Matlock, Mr Hage to Baslow and Mr. Asman to Old Brampton.

Next door was the surgery of George Robinson the vet, who would have had a great many horses, as well as cows, sheep and pigs to look after in the town and the surrounding country.

Eliza Arthur kept the next door shop, but we don't know what she sold. Her neighbour was a tailor, E. D. Brown. Almost all outer clothing was made to the order of the purchaser, very little being made to standard sizes to be purchased 'off the peg'. Even shirts were made to measure. Customers who could afford new clothes came to Mr Brown's shop and chose the material and pattern. He measured them and took a couple of weeks to make a suit, fitting the garments as they were partially made. Dresses were made by dressmakers who usually worked from their own

homes rather than in shops on the main streets.

Brown's shop abutted the workshop of George Frith the plumber. In the 1880's he would have been busy as more and more houses had water taps fitted indoors. Only the biggest of houses had a built in bath and very few had indoor water flush lavatories. The water supply, in lead pipes, came from the water mains that previously had served a stand pipe, serving all the people in a yard. He would have practised many skills, joining the pipes together with hot poured solder, wiping it into shape, with a little mole skin glove.

A passage way then led under the edge of Frith's to Froggatt's Yard, a place with sufficient history to warrant a special note.

FROGGATT'S YARD

This yard occupied the space now mainly taken up by Park Road, alongside the Portland Hotel that was driven through just before the turn of the century. The archway that led to it can still be seen between the first two houses in Low Pavement. It took its name from John Froggatt who owned most of the narrow strip right down to the river. In 1778 he gave an area of land to be used for a dissenters' meeting house and small burial ground. A number of prominent Chesterfield business men were dissenters, among them John Smith, who operated the Griffin iron-works at Brampton and a Robinson, a forebear of the operators of the Robinson works today. These, together with others, were trustees who raised money to build the Froggatt's Yard chapel called the Blue Meeting House because of its blue slate roof. These Welsh slates were the first used on a building in Chesterfield and probably came by sea to the Humber estuary and then by the new canal to the town. When John Smith died in 1784 he was buried alongside this chapel.

The congregation grew and the chapel could no longer seat all the Independents so in 1827 the old chapel was put up for sale and a new chapel was built against the private property on Rose Hill. The purchaser of the old building agreed to preserve the burial ground for at least fifty years. For a while the old chapel was used as school by Dr Cornelius Black, later changing its name and being known as Bowker's School until 1856.

Also in the yard was a large building used in the 1830's as Holland's lace workshop. Later it became the 'Alma Concert Hall' taking its name from a battle of the Crimean war, and ended its days as a rather run-down, cheap boarding house, before it was demolished, along with 25 yard houses, to make way for sidings for the new East Coast railway.

But now let's go back to LOW PAVEMENT. To the east of the arch to Froggatt's Yard was the office of Byron and Rangley, auctioneers and estate agents, who would have conducted the noisy sales of animals in the market place, and property in the Angel Inn. The eleventh property was occupied by the tobacconist, F. Harrison. Many more men (but far fewer women than now), smoked. Cigarettes and cigars were made locally in the Chesterfield tobacco factory, one of the biggest in the country but short clay pipes, still popular with country folk, were no longer locally made.

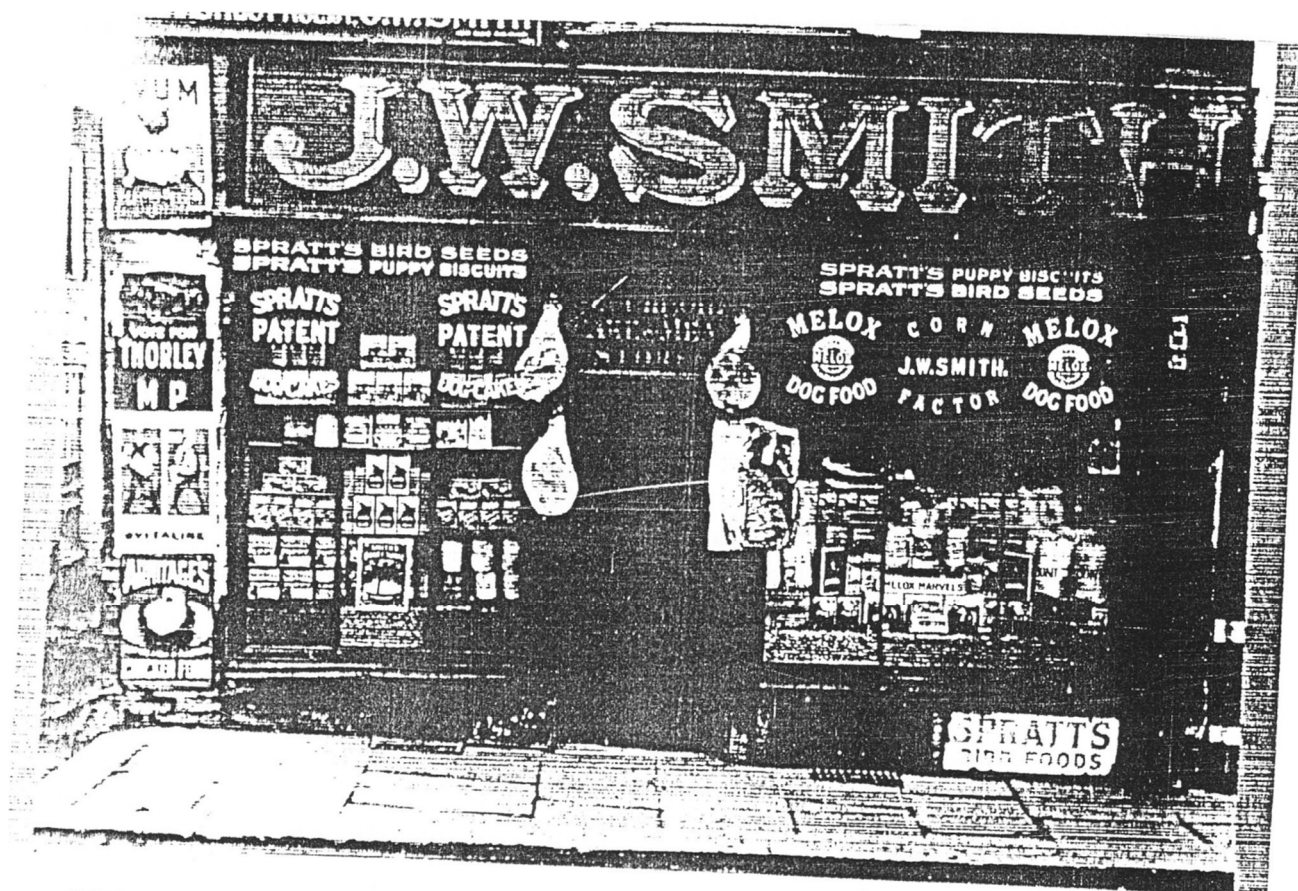


The tobacconist, F. Harrison, near to the entrance to Froggatt's Yard

Not many of those who bought tobacco from Mr Harrison would have used the services of the Sheffield and Union Bank which stood next door. Banking services had been growing rapidly through the century and a number of provincial and nation-wide banks were buying up the smaller local banks. But they were still rather forbidding places, their interiors solely fitted out with high mahogany counters and sloping desks at which perched the clerks keeping the heavy ledgers, all designed to impress upon their customers their reliability and confidentiality of service.

An archway gave entry to Bank Yard, a short area fenced off front the much larger Peacock Yard which took its name in the last 160 years from the Inn on the pavement, where in the 1880's Alex Bowler was the landlord. This inn (now the Tourist Information Centre, which in 1981 was No. 68 Low Pavement) was built originally in the early Tudor period, around 1500, as a detached building (to replace buildings that had been here from at least about 1200) possibly as a substantial town house, with one more bay than it now has, but possibly as a Guild meeting house. In the 1680s it was divided and used as two dwellings, with a croft, stable and pigsty at the back. The Wheldon family (who we will meet again further along the Pavement) lived in the larger part, and Thomas Bretland, Mayor of Chesterfield, in the smaller. Over the years the timber was hidden under a tile and plaster facing, which with the Welsh roof slates, disguised the true character of the building which was only revealed when it was restored in 1980 and re-roofed with Derbyshire stone tiles. The early 'burgage plots' on which the Peacock Inn stood had originally been much wider but were split in medieval times, the Peacock land being described in early documents as a 'half-burgage plot'. The entry to Peacock Yard ran alongside the warehouse of J. W. Smith the corn chandler, and housed on its eastern side the substantial Victoria flour mills powered by a steam engine and boiler

house with a tall chimney. At the end of the yard a foot-bridge crossed the Hipper giving access for pedestrians to Boythorpe.



J. W. SMITH – Corn Chandler alongside the entrance to Peacock Yard

The next frontage was the shop of another tailor, W. Wright, whose premises were divided by the arch to Robinson's Yard from those of W. Jephson the grocer. His neighbour was his competitor, R. Mitchell another grocer. The confectionary business run by Eliza Revill was divided from the next door bank by the entry to Prince's Court (named after the fell-monger John Prince, who had a business here in 1835), with some big houses along much of its length.

The bank, the London and Midland, managed in 1892 by Mr John Kerns, was a more imposing building, but less so than the large building, with its pleasant enclosed gardens, occupied by the solicitors, Stanton and Walker, who still have a practice in Soresby Street.

The fourth public house came next, the Crown and Cushion Inn alongside Brayshaw's, the printers, one side of which ran down Wheldon Lane, (named after the merchant who once lived at the 'Peacock') the only road access to Boythorpe from this part of the town.

J. W. Slack conducted his dental practice from his imposing residence on the other side of Wheldon Lane and had as his neighbours T. Ball and K. Fieldsend. two drapers who not only sold material by the length, unwound from heavy rolled bolts of cloth, and deftly cut by sharp Sheffield scissors hung from Mr Fieldsend's waist, but also the very latest line in fashionable lace curtains.

It was near here, rather than at the north west corner of New Square, that Thomas Secker, who in 1758 became Archbishop of Canterbury, was brought up by his sister, the wife of Richard Milnes, the tanner.

The next building, the Castle Inn, was built out on pillars across the pavement so that passengers arriving by coach could be sheltered from the weather while their baggage was unloaded and they waited to go inside. This pattern of 'Jettying' over the pavement was matched on the north side of the Market Place by T. P. Wood's (the original site of the Angel Inn, and on the east side by another public house, the Cathedral Vaults (now the Britannia Building Society). The Castle Inn, built about 1636 had replaced a house that belonged to Ralph Clarke, in 1598, the first Mayor of Chesterfield. From it coaches ran to Birmingham, the time table being published in the directory of Alderman T. P. Wood, each year. These directories, to publicise Wood's wines and spirits, were sold each year for sixpence, which in today's money would have the value of about 50p. Fortunately copies of most of them have been preserved in the Local Studies section of Chesterfield public library.

On one side of the inn was an arch leading to Wilcockson's Yard and on the other the arch to the long, street-like, Castle Yard with rows of houses down each side and a lace factory, close to the river, run in the 1880's by the Misses Johnson and Holmes. Only Hudson's the grocers came between Castle Yard and Brown's Yard giving a rear entrance to the houses. Brown's Yard was the home of a dyer's, a hatmakers, a nail-makers and a hand-loom weaver's works. At its riverside end was a very seedy, run down part of the town, known disparagingly as the 'Dog Kennels'. The grocer's, like all the shops along the Pavement, would have had its own characteristic smell. Grocers brought supplies in bulk and blended their own brands of tea and coffee. Sugar was weighed out of canvas sacks into blue paper bags on gleaming brass scales, and hams, to be sliced with long narrow knives, were hung from the ceiling. Often a cat, kept to deal with any rats, would be curled on the big cheeses stacked in the corner. Glass topped boxes, to display their contents of fancy biscuits, lined the counters, where the customers could sit to give their orders, which would then be delivered by the errand boy on a bicycle.

The twenty seventh building was used by a boot and shoe sellers, Stead and Simpson, who would have been supplied from the footwear factories in Leicester, though some footwear would have been purchased at the factories in Stoney Middleton.

Tanning and shoe making had been a very important industry in Chesterfield in the medieval period, but by the beginning of Queen Victoria's reign there were only a few tanners or shoe makers left. Either side of the shoe shop lay Wordsworth Yard (named not romantically after the Lakeland poet, but an ironmonger named Wordsworth) and Daniel's (a chemist proprietor in the 1850's) Yard.

Yet another inn, for many of the inns were sited around the market some distance from the main Lords' Mill Street into town, occupied the next building. This was the Three Tuns Inn. A tun is a very large cask for holding beer, sometimes as much as 252 gallons, and was an easy item to display on the sign board that Act of Parliament required to be displayed outside. The site of the inn had been given to the town corporation by Thomas Large who lived and had a dye-works here. In 1664 the corporation pulled down the house and built a malt and brew house, cooper house and stables, and the first of a number of inns to occupy the site. The last, built in 1794 was demolished in 1913 to make way for a wide Tontine Road, (only the remains of which run alongside the bus station behind

the Chesterfield Library).

Between the inn and the entry to Theatre Yard, still identifiable by its street sign, there were two other yards drawn on the Ordnance Survey maps of the 1890's but un-named. One was Greaves' Yard, named after the chemist who had started a business there in 1836 and the other Three Tuns Yard. A third yard, Ward's is named on the map. Names for the yards seem to have been given by local usage, reflecting the name of the principal occupier and changing over time as occupants came and went.

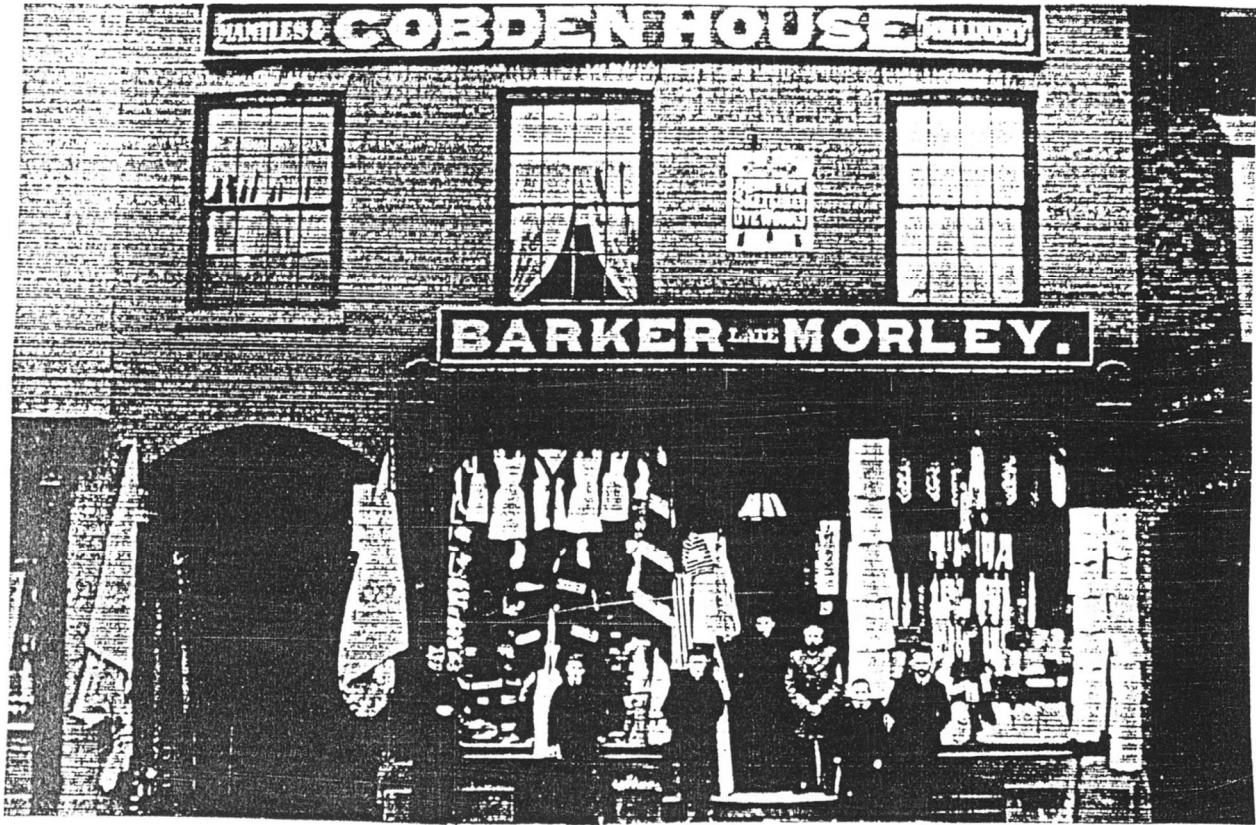
Another draper, F. Barker (who had taken over Mr Morley's business) had his shop at the top end of Ward's Yard (still signed) on the part of Low Pavement now called Central Pavement, and at its other end, by the pedestrian crossing on Beetwell Street. This yard, until it was sold about 1776 to Ward, was called Slack's Yard, after the family of fell-mongers who owned some of it and plied their rather evil smelling trade there, close to a tanner's yard. The Argos shop now stands in what was Ward's.

Hobson and Capps (tea blenders and grocers) Evard and Short (drapers) and J. H. Green (cabinet maker) occupied the shops which led up to Theatre Yard. This yard took its name from the Theatre Royal, at its southern end, that backed onto the town's Municipal Hall, the entry to which, was down Falcon Yard. A confectioner, T. B. Wilson kept the one shop and W. Wilson, a tea merchant the other, between these two Yards.

The Falcon Yard took its name from the coaching inn on the market square, where in 1892, Frank Everest, who was the landlord, announced the fact by having his name painted up in large letters across the front. This painting of the names of the shop and innkeepers, and what they sold, was a characteristic of all the trade premises in Chesterfield. The Falcon was an old inn that was certainly working in the 1620's and there may have been an inn on the site for two hundred years before then. In the yard behind, Charles Haslam, who described himself as a 'sauce maker to the Queen' had his work shop close to a printer's works and the warehouse of William Britt the ironmonger. Right at the end of the row, turning the corner into South Street, the Turner brothers had part of their drapery and haberdashery business, the main shop being across the street at the end of Packers Row.

The entry into Vicar Lane was still a little way down South Street, the entry as it is today being taken up by the last building in Packers Row.

So the next time you walk along Low Pavement think of those who went that way a century or more ago.



Frederick Barker and his family outside his Draper's business at Wards Yard entrance. It was taken about 1890. The business survived until 1953.

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