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A Village at Work

Part 2

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Delivered to your Door

The story of doorstep deliveries in Keyworth

Keyworth & District Local History Society

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A Village at Work

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Photo on front cover is of Dorothy Warden on her round

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INTRODUCTION

Doorstep Delivery in Keyworth

It is generally possible to distinguish two broad ways in which retailing is done: one, where the buyer goes to the seller for goods or services - i.e., to shops, offices or markets; and two, where the seller goes to the buyer to deliver the goods or services 'on the doorstep'. Well into the second half of the twentieth century, the latter method of doorstep retailing was an important part of the social fabric of local communities. This booklet presents four typical Keyworth businesses for which doorstep delivery was an essential - though not necessarily the sole - part of their operation. The survey is confined only to the sale and delivery of *goods:* services such as banking, insurance, hairdressing, knife-grinding and recreational facilities are outside its scope.

Several stages may be identified in the development of doorstep sale and delivery in Keyworth:

1. When the village was compact and small, confined to Main Street and The Square, as it was until the mid-19th. century, there was little or no call for doorstep delivery. Such retailing as there was took place in a few village shops and pubs, and the occasional market held in The Square, within easy walking distance of people's homes.
2. As the village grew by ribbon development with minor off-shoots, first along Nottingham Road and Bunny Lane in the 19th. century, and after 1920 along Selby Lane and Nicker Hill, and in adjoining parts of Normanton and Stanton, the population became more scattered. Until the 1950s, few people owned cars, so doorstep delivery, particularly of items that were bulky (coal and paraffin) or frequently needed (fresh bread, milk, vegetables, meat and daily newspapers), became popular, especially among those living some way from the shops. In addition, the Stop-me-and-buy-one ice cream vendor came round in the summer months on his tricycle with unamplified bell.

It was during the inter-war and early post-war periods that doorstep delivery probably reached a peak, heightened by fierce competition between many small local businesses (and a few that were not local) to maximise their share of the market by calling at customers' homes. Milk rounds

included Bradshaw's, Hebb's, Davill's, Elding's (of Plumtree) and the Nottingham Co-op; bread rounds were operated by Disney's, Watson's (of Willoughby), Mason's (of West Bridgford) and, again, the Co-op; many Keyworth farmers delivered meat in the villages, including Messers Pickard, Green, Sharp and Griffin; Warden's and Pike's nursery delivered greengroceries; while coal merchants included Davinson's and Holland's (both on Dale Road), Grice's and Derrick's. On a smaller scale were those who called at the doorstep on foot with a suitcase of household wares: wounded ex-servicemen from the Great War trying to eke out their mean pensions in the 1920s and '30s; a turbaned Sikh (name unknown) who created mild excitement by his unfamiliar appearance in the 1940s; and the Kleeneze man (Douglas Creasey) with his brushes and other household goods, who would also deliver to order well into the 1960s. All these were operating while Keyworth's population was little more than a thousand, though they mostly served neighbouring villages as well.

3. Technological developments resulted in a reduction in doorstep sales: growing car ownership from the mid-fifties made it easier for more people to carry home their shopping; refrigerators and freezers allowed them to buy in bulk on weekly, rather than daily shopping expeditions; and the introduction of gas and electricity, and later of central heating, into most homes, led to the near-abandonment of paraffin, and a sharp fall in the use of coal for heating and for cooking on the kitchen range. A further factor in the decline may have been the growing cost of labour, so that the price differential between, for instance, milk bought at the supermarket and on the doorstep has induced many to give up the latter during the last ten years. Even newspaper rounds are fewer than they used to be - though the papers are heavier.

4. With the start of the new century, we have been witnessing the beginning of a new kind of doorstep delivery: that associated with internet shopping. It is as yet at a very early stage, and the future is difficult to predict.

Until the 1920s, doorstep delivery was mainly by horse and cart, though pack-horses, push-carts and bicycles were also used; and the humble peddlar or hawker often carried his wares on foot, in a case or sack - as some still do today. But most house-to-house sales have, since the thirties, been delivered by motorised van, lorry or electric milk float, whether on a regular round or the occasional dropping off of purchases like furniture, too large to bring home in any other way.

The early businesses were limited in the range over which they could deliver by the speed of their horse-drawn vehicles. Also, in many cases there were several competing in the same market area, further limiting their scale of operation. Indeed, some were only viable because they also produced what they sold: the baker, dairy farm and nursery sold their own produce, either in their own shop, or by taking it to people's doorsteps, or both. Some could only make a living by cutting out the middleman.

On the other hand, coal, paraffin and newspaper distributors could not produce the goods they sold: they had to make their living simply as middlemen, creating pressure to increase turnover by diversification. Matt Wright, who also kept a shop, distributed paraffin round the village with a wide range of other household goods, though they were all said to smell of paraffin! George Davinson used his coal lorry to carry other bulky goods, like animal feed and hay bales for local farmers. Warden's, established in 1889 and the oldest private business in Keyworth, used to combine the sale and delivery of vegetables and fish, buying both from wholesale markets. And those who produced what they sold also diversified to increase their turnover, with milkmen carrying butter and eggs (and more recently soft drinks), while bakers' sidelines were cakes and biscuits.

The greater speed of modern vehicles means that they can cover a greater area, and Keyworth businesses which started by serving only Keyworth later ranged over many surrounding villages. They also became more capital-intensive: a motor vehicle is more expensive to buy and maintain than a horse and cart; tightening public health regulations required equipment for milk to be pasteurised and bottles sterilised. Some of the smaller concerns were unable to meet the new trading conditions and sold up. As a result the number of doorstep delivery firms declined, and the scale of survivors increased, in terms of the size of catchment area served and also of turnover, until a general decline of doorstep delivery set in, as noted above in stage 3.

Today, milk and vegetable rounds (now only by Express Dairies and Warden's respectively) are greatly reduced, as are coal deliveries, while there are no baker's rounds in the village. Boys and girls still deliver papers; the ice cream vendor, now motorised with sound amplified, can be heard during in summer - though the freezer in people's homes has resulted in a reduction of business; and, while paraffin is no longer taken round the village, diesel tankers discharge their load at infrequent intervals to the relatively few buildings with oil-fired central heating.

FOUR KEYWORTH BUSINESSES

The following four case studies trace the history of four Keyworth businesses involved in doorstep delivery: Warden's (fruit and vegetables), Bradshaw's Dairy, Disney's Bakery and Davinson's Coal Merchants. The style of the studies varies in that two are written by those who owned and ran the business being described, and two by members of the Keyworth & District Local History Society after interviewing the relevant owners. Three of the studies were written in 2001 and one in 2003.

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B. Warden & Son, Fish, Fruit, and Vegetables

Written in 2003 by Daphne Smith. Our thanks to Dorothy and Tony Warden and Edna Ecob (née Warden) for providing the material for this section

Warden's greengrocery is the oldest surviving business in Keyworth today. The earliest reference in Keyworth to its founder, John Warden, lies in the parish marriage register. It records that on 2 June 1879, John Warden, aged 21, labourer of Keyworth, son of William Warden, married Sarah Bolton, aged 19, of Keyworth, daughter of Thomas Bolton. The couple were living in Keyworth at the time of the 1881 Census; by then John, like so many men in Keyworth, was to be found working on the newly constructed Nottingham to Melton railway, as a plate layer. This census also reveals that whilst his wife was a native of Keyworth, he was born in Tavistock, Devon.

The 1891 Census shows that John Warden had become a 'fish hawker', that is, one who carries fish about for sale. Living with John and Sarah in 1891 were the two of their six children who survived infancy: Annie Elizabeth (aged 8), and John Thomas (aged 3). The family was living in one of a block of four houses which now constitute Nos. 18/20 Selby Lane. An 1897 survey shows that the Wardens' house contained a framework knitter's shop, the property then being rented from a William Woolley. Indeed, in 1891, Sarah's occupation is given as seamstress.

There is no mention of any other early activities of John Warden, but rabbits and greengrocery were added to the range of food sold over the

years. Fresh rabbits came from Major Robinson of Widmerpool, and vegetables from a Mr Burton of Woodborough. By the time of the 1901 Census[1], John Warden, hawker, is working 'on his own account', and his son, John Thomas, is also working as a hawker, presumably for his father. The business was probably flourishing, to the extent that Sarah no longer needed to work as a seamstress.

According to a survey of 1914, the Wardens had bought all four houses in the block in Selby Lane, and these were then in the joint ownership of John Warden and John Thomas Warden. The Wardens still lived in the same house with workshop, the other three houses in the block still being rented by other occupiers. John Thomas Warden served as a soldier with the Sherwood Foresters in the First World War. Meanwhile, he had married Mary, and they had five children, all of whom helped in the family business at various times. Reginald was the eldest, followed by Edna, who is now 93 years old and lives in Debdale House. Next came Kenneth, Minnie, and Bertram. Edna still remembers the excitement when her father came home on leave.

Deliveries of fish, fruit and vegetables continued in the period between the two world wars. Fish and chips were also cooked in the family home, to be carried in a basket by Kenneth and Bertram to houses in the village. In the Second World War Kenneth joined the Royal Air Force, and Reginald also served in the Armed Forces. While her two elder brothers were away, Minnie helped to run the business and continued to serve in the shop for many years. Her cheery presence was much appreciated.

John Thomas Warden ran the business after his father died in September 1941. When Bertram Warden and Dorothy Minett were married in April 1941, the Selby Lane building was still divided into four cottages. After their marriage, Bertram and Dorothy lived in one of the rear cottages, John Thomas and Mary in one at the front of the block. It is worth recording that John Thomas Warden was born and died in the same house. The work of converting the building into the two semi-detached houses of today was carried out by Mr Philip Attewell in the early 1960s. John Thomas Warden's youngest son, Bertram, succeeded his father in running the business, and he was joined by his son, Anthony.

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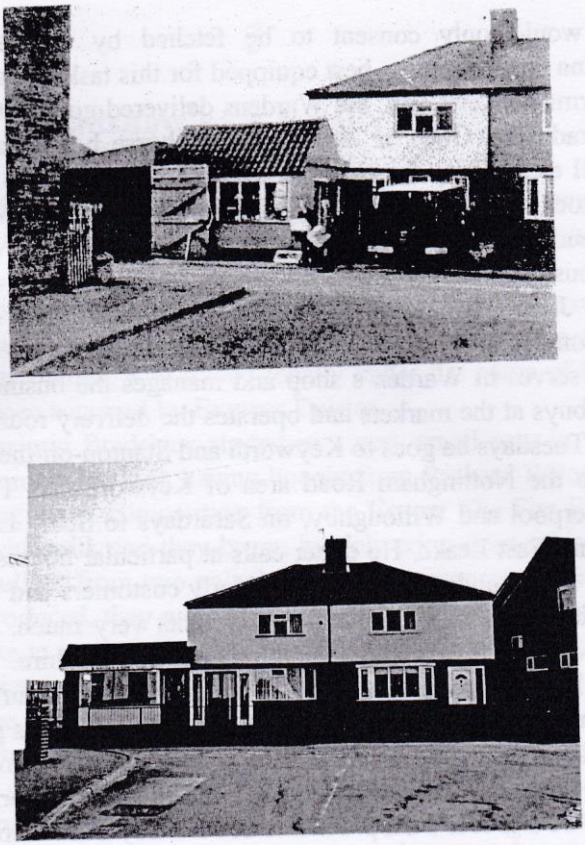
[1] RG13/3203, f159, p21



Warden's old shop (above) and new shop (below)

The old shop and garage at the roadside survived until the 1970s, when a new shop and garage were constructed, both set further back from the road. Dorothy says that the new shop was built behind the old one and that the old shop continued to function until the new one was ready. She told the story of the gentleman who passed by the old shop on his way to the village square and was amazed on his return two hours later to see the new shop in place and the old one no longer there.

The delivery of greengroceries was, at first, by horse and cart. Fifty years ago the horse was called Dolly, who lived in a field behind the block of

houses. She would only consent to be fetched by a person wearing spectacles; Edna thus becoming best equipped for this task! As well as to the houses and farms of Keyworth, the Wardens delivered goods at one time to Bunny and Bradmore. Once, at Bradmore, the horse bolted, a frightening experience still etched into the memory of Dorothy. They also visited East Leake, Costock, Willoughby-on-the-Wolds, Wysall, Widmerpool, Wymeswold and Stanton-on-the-Wolds. By 1952 they had a van to assist them in the business. Usually two members of the family went on the rounds, either John Thomas and Bertram, or Bertram and Dorothy, or Bertram and Tony.

Dorothy still serves in Warden's shop and manages the business with her son Tony. He buys at the markets and operates the delivery rounds from his white van. On Tuesdays he goes to Keyworth and Stanton-on-the- Wolds, on Wednesdays to the Nottingham Road area of Keyworth, on Thursdays to Wysall, Widmerpool and Willoughby, on Saturdays to Selby Lane and the Fairway area and East Leake. He either calls at particular houses or stops at suitable places and sounds his horn. The elderly customers and those living in villages without any shops appreciate his visits very much. On Fridays they Warden's direct deliveries of vegetables from Lincolnshire.

The business is now one hundred and fourteen years old. During its time there have been many changes in Keyworth. The population has grown from eight hundred to eight thousand. Warden's is now the only shop on Selby Lane. Dorothy remembers when the house opposite on the corner of Elm Avenue used to be a grocer's shop. Further down Selby Lane were the Board School, the windmill, Mr Mills the cobbler, and Dick Rimmer the coffin maker. The business has had to move with the times and change from old money to decimal coinage and from pounds to kilos. There have been changes in other things too. The range of fruit and vegetables sold is much greater than it was 50 years ago. Kiwi fruit from New Zealand, for example, is popular with the customers of today, but in the past fruit and vegetables were restricted to the English season. Due to air transport there is now a continual supply from various countries of the world throughout the year. During all these changes the Warden family has continued to give a valuable service to the village and surrounding area for four generations.

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Bradshaw's - a Family Dairy

Written in 2001 by Bob Hammond. Our thanks to Marjorie and Elwyn Bradshaw for providing all the material for this section

Bradshaw's milk delivery vans were a familiar sight in Keyworth and surrounding villages for several decades until the family business was sold in 1989 to Northern Dairies, who traded locally under the name of Dale Farm and have since been acquired by Express Dairies.

Charlie and Marjorie Bradshaw started in a very small way in May 1939 from Firs Farm on Nicker Hill, having bought from Richard Wilcox a round that was declining under competition from the Co-op. The Firs Farm tenant supplied them with milk and they began by delivering it on a bicycle - five gallons a day, ladling from two pails balanced on a pannier in front. When bottles were introduced, they were at first washed by hand. The round soon recovered, thanks to hard work, good customer service and a wide network of family and friends in Keyworth and Stanton, so that larger premises were needed for a base.

The growing Bradshaw family (eventually there were to be six children) then lived in a small cottage on Selby Lane, near Wright's garage. They found new premises for the dairy at the other end of Selby Lane, opposite Selby Lodge. As the business grew, a pony and cart took over from the bicycle, and a steam sterilising plant heated by coke boiler was installed for cleaning empties, together with a bottling machine, which also put tops on the bottles (at first cardboard, later silver foil). On one occasion, the cat got into the steriliser where it met a steamy end.

In 1941, while the business was still based on Selby Lane, the Bradshaws bought three acres of land with a bungalow on the Melton Road in Stanton. This became the family home. In 1955 the business also moved to Stanton, for which extensions and outbuildings were added to the bungalow. This no doubt made sense in the long run but was highly inconvenient at the time: pasteurisation equipment had just been installed at Selby Lane when the landlord, Charles Butler, gave notice to quit as he wanted to sell the land for housing development.

By now Charlie had a van to deliver milk to Keyworth, but Marjorie still covered Stanton on her bicycle, sometimes with a child seated over the rear mudguard. At other times, the children used to serve nearby customers on foot before morning school, a ten-year-old in charge and younger ones assisting, the crates of bottles carried on a home-made go-cart.

The next thirty years was a period of steady, and sometimes sudden expansion, thanks largely to a combination of business acumen and hard work by a large and united family. But favourable circumstances also played their part.

First, most local farmers who had been delivering their own milk began to sell their rounds and concentrate exclusively on farming. This may have owed something to their growing prosperity, so that they no longer needed to supplement their incomes with milk delivery. But more important was the greater stringency of food hygiene requirements, particularly pasteurisation of milk. Many farmers were not prepared to invest in the necessary equipment for their small turnover: milk delivery was becoming more capital intensive, and was best conducted on a larger scale by specialists like the Bradshaws who, as we have seen, were already pasteurising their milk. Hebb's and Oldham's rounds in Keyworth were taken over, increasing Bradshaw's market share in the then rapidly expanding village. But some of the other take-overs extended the market to neighbouring villages: the round of Longcliffe farm brought in Bunny and Bradmore; that of Cockayne's Plumtree and Normanton.

So another factor underlying the expansion of the business was the geographical spread of its market. The advances that brought about this spread were not only due to take-overs. One fortuitous event in particular gave the process a sudden fillip. In 1960, Nottingham Co-op delivery men held a one day strike; Bradshaws received phone calls from nearby villages asking if they had any milk to spare, and the result was footholds established in Cotgrave, Kinoulton, Hickling, Owthorpe and Ruddington. The delivery that day was 160 gallons instead of the usual 100. Those footholds grew over the coming years.

The sixties and early seventies saw the greatest increase in scale of operations, and this was due principally to the rapid growth of local population, and therefore of the potential market during this decade and a half. Keyworth's population had already doubled in the fifties - from 1330 in 1951 to 2652 in 1961. But it was to more than double again in the 1960s, recording 5754 in the 1971 census. More modest increases occurred

elsewhere, particularly in Cotgrave and that part of Normanton on the Keyworth side of the railway (which, in 1984, became a part of Keyworth parish).

By the early seventies, the firm was collecting and distributing some 700 gallons of milk daily - a sevenfold increase on 1960 before the Co-op strike. To handle this amount, new equipment had to be installed. To the original 50 gallon pasteurisation tank three more of similar capacity were added, but when they became inadequate, a completely new system was installed - a 'high temperature short time' unit (HTST), which both heated the incoming milk to the sterilising temperature of 160 degrees F, and then cooled it down to refrigeration level, all in a few minutes. Further bottling facilities were also added, while the fleet of vehicles collecting and distributing the milk also increased and staff additional to the family began to be employed.

A further sharp increase in turnover occurred when a five year contract to supply milk to the schools of south Notts was won in 1972. An additional 150 gallons were involved, all in third-of-a-pint bottles so enough for 3600 children, bringing the total amount handled to about a thousand gallons a day. By this time, the firm was using nine transit vans and seven electric floats, and employing, in addition to seven family members (all now grown up) about a dozen regular and some casual staff. The days of bicycle and go-cart delivery were over. The area it served is indicated by the villages named in the accompanying advertisement.

Bradshaw's did not enjoy a monopoly in this delivery area. Two of its major competitors were the Co-op, based in Nottingham, and the Long Clawson dairy, maker of Stilton cheese. While competition is a spur to efficiency, it can also be wasteful when several vans cover the same widely dispersed villages. Some rationalisation was achieved in the mid-seventies, when Bradshaw's gave up Ruddington and Cotgrave to the Co-op, and Hickling to Long Clawson, while these firms surrendered their presence in Kinoulton, Bunny and Bradmore to Bradshaw's.

The late seventies saw the replacement of milk churns by tankers. Until then, loaded churns (the early ones made of steel and almost as heavy as the milk they held!) had to be heaved onto the back of a lorry, a task from which Marjorie was not exempt although it was more suitable for professional weight lifters! Now, the tanker could be filled with a hose. But this had another effect: tankers could only operate economically at a scale larger than Bradshaw's turnover, so collecting was subcontracted to a specialist firm with a fleet of tankers (Newton's) who ranged over a wide area and delivered to a limited number of large centres, of which the Stilton cheese factory at Long Clawson was one. Here the milk was sterilised and bottled before being sent to Bradshaws, so that much of the equipment at Stanton became redundant. Also the direct link between local milk producers and distributor was broken.

One last development in the retailing of milk must be mentioned. From the late seventies, supermarkets have been progressively undercutting and undermining the doorstep delivery firm, as shoppers have become increasingly car-borne and therefore able to carry their own milk home. To counter this, Bradshaws began to supply Gateway and other shops with cartons of milk on the principle "if you can't beat 'em, join 'em"; they also expanded their area of operation further, into the new West Bridgford estates then being built. So while doorstep delivery was generally in decline, Bradshaws was able to increase its sales right up to the year it sold to Northern Dairies (1989). Whether it could have continued to do so into the nineties is a moot point; perhaps the business was sold at the right time.

Although doorstep milk delivery was always the mainstay of the dairy, it had diversified from the early days. The three acres behind the bungalow were turned into a smallholding stocked with poultry (chickens, geese, turkeys) and pigs, a few sheep and a cow. Cream was made by skimming some of the milk and feeding some of the residue to the pigs (most of the

rest went down the drain); slightly off milk was bought from the Co-op dairy for making cottage cheese. The cream and cheese, together with eggs were carried regularly on the rounds, while birds - plucked by Charlie and dressed by Marjorie - were supplied to order. (Marjorie was dressing a bird two hours before going into labour with her sixth child!) For customers who liked it very rich, Jersey milk was obtained from Dr Swan, a surgeon and hobby farmer, on Widmerpool Lane, and also from Davill's farm. Bradshaw's did not deal in slimmers' milk! The pigs and sheep were sold, while the one cow was employed to suckle three calves a year (its own and two bought in) which were then fattened and taken to market. Vegetables were grown for home consumption, except when the sheep got there first!

Inevitably there were occasional accidents, emergencies or other memorable events to liven the years of routine service. Snow provided some. Electric floats had difficulty on steep hills; both they and the vans were equipped with sledges which could be dragged on foot to the more inaccessible houses, though in one case the sledges were provided by a customer at the bottom of Plumtree Park, who kept them ready, so that milk could be dragged up the hill. On one occasion in the late fifties, all the vans and floats became stranded on their rounds. Local farmers came to the rescue with tractors and trailers, delivering to customers' doorsteps and returning empties to the dairy. A few years later, in the bitter winter of 1963, Elwyn and his wife were delivering by sledge to the top of Owthorpe hill, a mile out of Cotgrave; they intended to return to their van at the foot of the hill by riding on the sledge, but it gathered such speed that they finished almost back in the village, and had to walk back up the hill to their van.

Slopes could have more serious outcomes. One such occurred on Cedar Drive, the day after April Fools Day, 1985, and it could not be blamed on the snow. The roundsman and his trainee assistant had both left the float to take milk to different houses, and had not left the hand-brake fully on. The float rolled down, crossed Main Street and smashed through the door of one of the houses in Brookview Court, depositing two crates of milk at the foot of the stairs and soaking the carpet. The roundsman reported the accident to Elwyn back in Stanton, who reported it to the police. The reply he got was: "If you had rung me yesterday, I wouldn't have believed you!"

The business had come a long way since Charlie and Marjorie started it in 1939. The earliest accounts still surviving are those for 1942, when turnover was £1743. Forty three years later, in 1985, it was £450,000 - 260 times as much. In that time inflation had devalued the pound by a factor of about 17,

so the real growth of the business was about fifteenfold. Charlie died in 1985, but had nominally retired some years earlier, when he handed the running of the business over to his three sons, though he continued to work until the end. One of the sons, Elwyn, bought the others out in 1983. Six years later he sold the whole concern - but not the family home with its adjoining land - to Northern Dairies, and so ended more than fifty years during which the name of Bradshaw could be seen every day, moving around all over Keyworth and its neighbours.

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Disney's Bakery in the snow

4

Kneading, Peeling and Scuffing: The story of Disney's Bakery

Written in 2001 by Jeffrey Disney

Origins

My grandfather Frederick Disney, who started the bakery, was born in a row of cottages on Old Lane (now Elm Avenue) in 1879 - the same year that the Plumtree station was opened. On leaving the village Board School he commenced work at Aldreds, the bakers of Ilkeston, lodging during the week in the town. It was while working there that he met and married my grandmother, Catherine Sewell.

By the turn of the century he decided to return nearer home and took the opportunity to rent an old bakery in Plumtree. From here he plied his trade, baking and delivering to the local villages. His youngest sister Ethel, now nearly 104 years old[2], remembers making these deliveries by means of a large wicker hamper on wheels.

By 1910 he was able to purchase a plot of land at the junction of Debdale Lane and Highfield Road. Here he built the bakehouse on the north-west corner of his land.

In Business

The oven that was installed was quite a primitive affair called a 'scuff' oven - so called because the heat was generated by filling the oven with anything combustible, whether wood, coal or a mixture of each. The ash and cinders were raked out or 'scuffed' and the inside of the chambers quickly cleaned with a type of mop. Dough would then be placed or 'set' on the oven bottom and the doors sealed until the bread was baked.

By 1912 grandfather could afford to build the house which fronts onto Debdale Lane (No. 20). Some years later he was persuaded by the Nottingham Corporation water department to have mains water installed in the house with the inducement of free water to the bakehouse which, up to then, had been served only by a well.. (When I took over the business in

[2] This section was written in 2001; Ethel has since died.

1965, the tariff was still only 15 shillings [75p] annually, though this was soon increased!)

1914 saw the outbreak of war. Three of Frederick's four brothers were called up, but he remained as his job was classed essential for the national good. However, the losses sustained by our forces in France and elsewhere were so high that in early 1918 he too was conscripted, at the age of almost 40. So, leaving the safety and comfort of Debdale Lane, Frederick was unceremoniously thrust into the dangerous and inhospitable surroundings of army field bakeries in France. However, a local remarked that some people on the south coast were nearer the action than he was - which hardly enhanced his military image! (An interesting aside here: Frederick and his three brothers all returned from the war relatively unharmed, while another branch of the family in the village lost all four of their sons - their names are inscribed on the roll of honour in Keyworth church.)

With Fred's departure the business was in crisis. This necessitated my father, Cyril, leaving school at the age of 12 to help my grandmother and other relatives to keep the bakery going until the end of the war. When Fred was demobilized, he and his son ran the business together.

At this point I am indebted to Bill Pike, who occasionally helped my father with delivering, for the next four paragraphs. Bill remembers at different times two horses being used to pull the bread cart. They were shod by Jimmy Barnett at The Old Forge (now a solicitor's office) in Plumtree. The more memorable of the two was called Bob who was purchased, Bill thinks, as a retired pit pony from Gedling colliery - which might account for his unpredictable and sometimes obdurate behaviour, illustrated by the following anecdotes.

Out on the road it was very difficult to get him to pass any oncoming vehicle: he had to be stopped and held in a tight rein until the road was clear again. On one occasion, Bill, accompanied in the cart by my father's brother Eric, was driving him down Bunny Lane past the row of cottages, when Ellis's bus came into view. They slowed down, but then Bob reared up and backed the cart into the bus, damaging both rear wheels. When Fred heard about it he was furious and exclaimed: " I towd yer not ter tek im wi yer!"

One of the most hair-raising drives was returning home from Normanton along Platt Lane, as Bob would always refuse to go under the railway bridge. One day, with the reins held tight he suddenly bolted. It took Bill, striving with might and main, to hold on until they reached Price's Corner before the horse was brought under control.

Bob and the bread cart

One further story relates to an occasion when my father's sister Hilda was a passenger in the cart. Travelling up the hill from Normanton towards Melton (before the Plumtree and Normanton by-pass was constructed), the cart overturned spilling the bread being delivered, together with Hilda, into the ditch.

In 1929 or 1930 a van was purchased, which no-one knew how to drive. By trial and error, father was eventually able to effect a somewhat erratic circuit around the village. But Bill tells me it possessed a large knob on the dash board which he was instructed to pull if all else failed. Some might say at this point: "Not much progress: merely a mechanised version of Bob!"

Stan Price well remembers this van - a Model T Ford - and tells me how difficult it was to start if the advance and retard lever on the steering column was incorrectly set. He tells of an accident which caused injury to my father for this very reason. The kick-back from the starting handle was so violent that it resulted in a broken wrist. This happened outside the post office, now occupied by Keyworth Travel.

Another eccentric feature of the van was that, on a continuous run, the exhaust pipe would glow red-hot. This did prove an advantage in cold weather as it provided a crude but welcome heating system for the cab.

Baking

Mention must now be made of the processes in bread-making at this time. No machinery was employed: all the dough was mixed by hand, a tedious, arm-aching exercise. It was gradually mixed by adding water to flour,and then left to rise at one end of some long troughs. When sufficiently risen, it was kneaded or 'knocked back' until fully 'ripe', to 'weigh off', which was done by balancing scales, hand-moulding and 'tinning up'. The only piece of machinery I can recall was a 'drum mixer', which stood in a corner of the bake-house like a Victorian relic, but which I can never remember being used. It looked like a tombola drum and stood approximately six feet high. Its inactivity, I gathered, was due to three reasons : the effort required to turn the handles when loaded; its inability to produce a smooth enough dough; and the extreme difficulty involved in cleaning the inside after use.

The bakehouse and residence on the site of Nos. 18a and 20 Debdale Lane only occupied about half the plot. The rest was used as a chicken run and vegetable garden. Both grandfather and father kept chickens all their working lives. This gave rise to the following story by a local observer - almost certainly apocryphal - that he had seen the chickens perched on the edge of the mixing troughs, studiously following the proceedings. As a consequence, he claimed to have discovered the secret for the unique flavour of Disney's bread !

New ovens were installed in 1930. These were steam tubed and coke fired. Besides giving more heat, they led to a cleaner environment in which to work. They were bought from a firm in the East End of London called the Globe Works and were delivered by rail to Plumtree Station. The components were then transferred to Debdale Lane by horse and cart. Consistent with this type of oven was the skill required in the use of the 'peel', or as I have often heard it referred to as 'that spade on a pole'. Speed

and deftness were needed to fill and empty the oven rapidly, so reducing the heat loss from the baking chambers.

Attitudes and Customs of the time

The Disney family's politics had traditionally been Liberal, but by this time were broadly Labour. Our main competitors between the wars, and for a number of years afterwards, were the Co-op. As far as I know, no member of the family would enter a Co-op store or buy anything connected with them. 'Divi' was disparaged, and this branch of the movement was never embraced.

My father would tell me that in common with the custom at that time, he would occasionally find on delivering to a customer, there would be a coffin under the dining room table. Most houses in the village would consist of only a dining room and scullery and as Chapels of Rest were not in vogue then, a deceased member of the family would be laid there until the funeral. The local lady who prepared them for burial was Miss Polly Marriott, who lived in Attenborough's Yard off Main Street.

World War 2.

History was to repeat itself as 1939 approached. My father, like his before, was judged to be in a reserved occupation. However he still had to do his bit. This entailed joining the local detachment of the AFS (Auxilliary Fire Service) which later became the NFS. Being employed locally meant that, should the alarm sound, he had to drop whatever he was doing and report immediately to the station - situated in what is now Middleton's Yard. It also meant joining the rota for night crews. Often he would come straight off night duty into the bakehouse the following morning. In spite of rationing, there were compensations, particularly if the night crew included a greengrocer, a farmer and a baker. I believe they ate very well !

During the early war years I well remember helping to 'weigh off' and 'mould', standing on a box between grandfather and father at the work top. The main topic of conversation was the current progress of the war. I vividly recall asking my grandfather two questions that had puzzled me since the outbreak of war. These were, firstly, why were soldiers reported in the press for misdemeanours nearly always called Pete? And why were Short Stirlings so called when they did not appear to be that short? After being suitably enlightened on both points I remember thinking, what a pity that such perspicacity was confined to a village bakehouse !

Some of my clearest memories concern delivering bread round the village. As in the bakehouse, the chief conversation would invariably be the prosecution of the war. In particular, I remember long discussions between Bernard Bloor (who was clerk to the Parish Council, and lived in the first house on Selby Lane), Francis Summers (from Blind Lane, now Commercial Road) and his old school friend Harry Hebb (from Main Street). Churchill's strategy and tactics rarely seemed to accord with theirs ! The time it took to complete the rounds would largely depend on how many members of the 'war cabinet' were at home. Time and motion studies were then still a very distant concept.

Baking continued relatively uneventfully during the war years. For instance, our specialities such as queen cakes and plum and seed cakes were still made. These would be in evidence on such special occasions as school, Sunday school and church parties. Our most popular confection, a finger-iced bun, was known by all the locals as Disney's Lardy Buns. Near the end of the war, shortages were being felt. This was reflected in the inability to produce a decent loaf of bread. The reason for this was our being compelled to use nearly all English wheat, this traditionally being of poor quality due mainly to the low gluten content.

After the war

In 1946, bread rationing was introduced. This meant dealing with coupons. The whole scheme, certainly in our case, proved to be something of a farce. My youngest brother Richard joined my father from school in 1958, and it was as a result of his leaving that I took over in 1965. By this time a Read Barons dough mixer was in use, although the loaves were still hand moulded.

My tenure coincided with a major growth of the village. The increase in population meant a sudden larger demand had to be met fairly rapidly. Although within a year or so I had three vans serving the rounds, door-to-door delivering was not in general proving to be cost effective, and was in the wider world falling from favour. With this in mind, we moved into the shop on Debdale Lane in October 1968. Thereafter, the rounds were gradually wound down as the shop became the main outlet.

More machinery was introduced (not I must say with everyone's endorsement), and a two-deck gas-fired oven installed. This now meant instant and direct heat, and for the first time ever, not having to rush back from a visit in order to light up and stoke the fires beforehand. 1974 saw the

old bakehouse demolished - sadly no photographs exist - and a new one built (see photo on page 16).

Two events during the seventies are worthy of note. Firstly, the power workers' strike of 1973. This meant that electricity was only available at restricted hours. Night baking was a bit of a nightmare. Provision for lighting was by low wattage bulbs run from car batteries. Although the oven was fired by gas, the governors were controlled by electricity. Mixing, moulding, etc., had to be sandwiched in between the cuts.

The second event was the bread strike. This was even more traumatic, certainly for those working at the retail end. The whole national demand had to be met by the 6000 - 7000 small independent bakers - a virtual impossibility. In our own case, despite baking almost round the clock, large queues formed outside the shop as everyone claimed to be a regular customer. Determining who was regular, fairly regular, intermittent, etc., proved to be less than straightforward. One story is worth recalling. It concerns a young lad about 10 years old, who was patiently waiting his turn in the queue. On gaining his loaf, he was seen outside immediately selling it to the highest bidder! His whereabouts today are not known, but a fair guess would be a tax haven!

When my younger son Michael, who had worked in the business since leaving school, decided his ambitions led him in other directions, a decision had to be made. So although earlier than intended, I retired and sold the business at the end of 1988 to Hopkins. Thus ended the Disney dynasty, four generations of bakers. Ten years later, the shop and bakery closed altogether, squeezed out of business by the larger operation of Costcutter on the other side of Prices Corner.

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Davinson's Coal Yard on Dale Road, 1995

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Working with 'The Black Stuff' Davinson's Coal Merchants

This was written in 2001 by George Davinson. He retired the following year and the business was taken over by Coal Products Ltd. Our thanks to Lynn Davinson for her help

The Davinson family have supplied coal to Keyworth and surrounding areas since 1923. Three generations of Davinson men were involved in a business whose fortunes have closely mimicked the decline in the coal industry of the last eighty years.

The early years

My father bought the business in 1923. It had never been his intention to be a coal merchant. At the time he was a butcher, working in Cotgrave. His ambition had been to open his own butcher's shop, but when an arranged sale fell through, and the coal business was up for sale, his career aspirations took a dramatic turn, thus sealing the future for the next two generations of Davinson men. I wonder what my life and that of my sons would have been like had my father become a master butcher instead.

My father, like the other local coal merchants at that time, used the yards at Plumtree station to store coal. The coal arrived by train into the station and each merchant would have to unload it from the wagons within two days or be charged demurrage. Competition was fierce amongst the merchants, as there were four or five operating in Keyworth during those early years.

The coal came from collieries at Bulwell, Cinderhill, Gedling, Cossall, Clifton, Hucknall and Annesley, to name but a few. Coal was graded on quality, each pit having different grades. Father always tried to sell the best quality, which came at that time from Hucknall and Gedling collieries. I wonder what he would think if he knew that at the turn of the century, some eighty years after he started his business, the best coal comes from as far away as Colombia!

Until 1948, coal merchants were regulated by the local fuel overseer who, for those merchants operating in Keyworth, would be the Council Offices in

Bingham. The fuel overseer worked under the direction of the regional coal officer (North Midland region). In 1948, the overseer moved to offices in Stockhill Lane, Basford. He would publish maximum retail prices that coal merchants could charge their customers, and the merchants had to display this on their premises. Licenses to carry goods for hire or reward were granted under the Road and Traffic Act of 1933, and cost my father £1 a year in 1938.

Father delivered to customers in Cotgrave, Plumtree, Stanton, Willoughby, Wysall and Widmerpool as well as in Keyworth. He not only delivered to households but also to businesses, including Disney's bakery on Debdale Lane for the bread ovens, Wright's garage, and local nurseries for heating greenhouses.

The Coal Yard

My father married Grace in 1930 when they were both 28 years old. The ceremony took place in Keyworth parish church. They lived initially in Post Office Yard, which ran down the side of where the present post office stands, before moving to 9 Debdale Lane (later re-numbered 14) some time in the 1930s.

My parents rented a piece of land on Lilac Street (originally called New Road and now Dale Road)[3], where my father used to keep hens, ponies and two pigs. He added a garage which he, Percy Stephenson and others moved bodily from its site on Debdale Lane, where it had previously been a butcher's shop called Newton's. The garage is still in use today. My parents purchased this land in 1946 and, in 1960, it was turned over for use as a coal yard. Later in the decade my father stopped using Plumtree station to store coal and worked instead entirely out of the yard.

The picture opposie shows my father as he set out on his deliveries. He had a horse and cart, a shovel and wheelbarrow, and delivered his coal loose to his customers. Weighing the coal was by means of the weighbridge at Plumtree station, and then by the use of a strange-looking pair of scales that still languish somewhere in the back of the garage. Life improved with the introduction of coal sacks which reduced the amount of shovelling, while delivering became much quicker when he bought his first lorry in 1933,

[3] I do not know whether Lilac Street gained its name from the lilac trees that grew there, but they have been there for as long as I can remember, and still survive, screening our yard from the road.

which also meant that he could deliver to customers much further away than previously.

My father with horse and dray at New Corner in the 1920s

The War Years

I was born in 1941 and have little recollection of the war years. I know that, as a coal merchant, my father was in a reserved occupation and therefore did not have to join up like so many of his peers. Neither do I know if he took part in any other wartime occupations like many of the men at home did. The war had an effect on his business, both during the war years and most certainly afterwards when coal restrictions came in. Among my father's papers I found a notice issued by the Ministry of Fuel & Power indicating to domestic customers in the Midlands area that the maximum amount of coal they could obtain from their merchants between May and October 1944 would be two tons. The notice went on to state that these were not rations as the merchants would not have sufficient coal to supply the maximum to everybody.

Merchants had been instructed to distribute their stocks as fairly as possible, to offer everyone a fair share of what was available. The Ministry wanted

households to build up a reasonable stock, as supplies were likely to be limited during the coming winter, under the slogan

Summer Savings Mean Winter Warmth

One can only imagine the difficulties faced by my father and other merchants like him during those years.

Because of shortages, the government introduced price controls. During 1944 Bingham Rural District Council published their retail prices for best coal, which on November 25th was 60/6d per ton, about £3 in decimal currency. In November 2000 the equivalent coal would have cost £125 for the same amount.

Father did not just deliver coal but also collected and delivered other goods. One local lady can remember him collecting ice cream; he collected and delivered Silcocks animal feed for local farmers; and in the summer would help Ken Wilson collect his hay bales. He later obtained a licence for furniture and household effects removal: he was allowed to convey furniture any distance and other goods within a radius of 20 miles of Keyworth Post Office.

The Second Generation

I cannot remember when I first got involved in the business but I recall writing out customer lists and deliveries for my father when I got in from school. I had never intended to be a coal merchant. My first job was that of an apprentice electrician, which suited me for just over a year. I soon decided, however, that the life of an electrician was not for me, and joined my father temporarily until I had decided what to do. That was 44 years ago! Like my father before me, my introduction to the life of a coal merchant had been accidental!

Living and working with my father was at times difficult, but I believe we built the kind of relationship that would not have been possible for many of my peers. My memories are mostly good ones, and although we worked hard, we did have some laughs. I particularly remember delivering to a customer's house in the winter when we had a local pensioner, Frank Pitchfork, working for us. Heavily laden with a full coal sack on his back, Frank tripped backwards from the coalbunker and landed in the customer's fishpond! I still chuckle at the memory of Frank sitting on the edge of the pond with water up to his knees and my father and I unable to assist him as we were helpless with laughter! It could be that the customer is still out there

and reading this. If so, thank you for the loan of your husband's trousers and wellington boots!

Coaling is a dirty business and life at 9, Debdale Lane involved frequent washing in a tin bath in the kitchen, with water heated in a copper. When I left the family home after my marriage to Sheila in March 1967, my parents converted my bedroom into a bathroom, making life considerably easier for my then 66-year-old father.

Sheila and I moved to 3 Debdale Lane (opposite my parents[4]) on our marriage. When my father retired I took over the business, which was now called GH Davinson and continued more or less as it had done in my father's time. Sheila took on the role of receptionist and secretary, in addition to renovating our new home, and December 1967 saw us joined by twin boys, adding to her already busy life.

Health Issues

Media coverage in the last few years has highlighted the effect of coal dust on the health of miners. Although merchants are not exposed at the same level of intensity to coal dust, and work out in the open air, dust can still be a problem. Coal used to be delivered in sacks made from what my father called coconut matting. It was an open-weave hessian-like material which, when dry, would allow the coal dust to sprinkle through the gaps, rubbing into clothes and falling down the back of one's neck. In the 1980s polypropylene took over, a more lightweight material which kept the dust firmly inside, making carrying much less unpleasant. My memories of my father are of a man with a constant cough, although how much of that was due to smoking and how much to dust will never be known.

I employed a succession of men to help me with the business when it was booming. Sheila would then be inundated with calls, and our working days, particularly in winter, would be long. It was not at all unknown to be delivering late into the evening, and many a Christmastime we were still out at 6.30 pm on Christmas Eve to ensure our customers had their coal for over the festive season.

My father died in 1974 at the age of 73. How much the effects of coal dust contributed to his death we cannot tell. It does make me wonder about the

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[4] Both sides of Debdale Lane originally had odd numbers, presumably because, until 1984, they were in different parishes which both numbered the houses without consulting each other. The north side of the road, which in 1984 was transferred from Normanton to Keyworth, has now been given even numbers.

effects on my own health as it is hard to assess the damage until later in life. If you were to ask my wife however, she would argue that the dust in her carpets and in the bathroom after a shower has ruined *her* health during the years she has spent washing and scrubbing it away!

The biggest threat to my health comes from the sheer physical demands that shovelling and carrying 50 kilogram sacks of coal exerts on the body. Back injuries are common and the stress on muscles and joints take their toll. I have now spent 44 years as a merchant and my body reflects every one!

Sheila and I moved round the corner to our present home on Dale Road in 1980 and we now overlook the coal yard. Customers telephoning to order coal can speak to my wife as they always have, and she continues to be receptionist, secretary and dispatch clerk! Anybody labouring under the illusion that she is just a housewife could not be further from the truth, though that is another role she juggles into her day. She now draws the line at loading 25 kg sacks of pre-packed coal into customers' cars, but can be found 'doing the books' every evening, often with me snoozing in a chair!

The National Perspective

Whenever you mention the coal industry to anyone, conversation inevitably turns to the dark days of the miners' strike in 1984. Although Nottinghamshire was at the heart of the demonstrations, the effect on coal merchants was not as devastating as it was on miners. As coal was still being produced merchants were able to obtain it and supply it to customers, although there were times when the whole episode became extremely stressful for everyone in the industry. Strangely enough, it was a shorter strike in the 1970s, lasting only a few weeks, that I remember being much more difficult.

The strike took place just after Christmas and coal production ceased entirely. Supplies of certain types of coal became scarce almost immediately and customers were offered substitute stock. I remember queuing with hundreds of merchants early one Saturday morning when we heard that coal was available at the depot, then on Queens Drive, and was likely to be the last for a while. There were some ugly scenes.

At about the same time coal came under pressure from the competition of alternative fuels such as natural gas and oil, from which it has never really recovered. Life after the 1984 strike saw continued streamlining of the industry through pit closures. Privatisation of the mines in 1994 signalled the

end of many of the remaining Nottinghamshire collieries which, at their peak, produced over 25 million tons a year.

The Third Generation

By the time the third generation joined the business, life in the yard was a little easier, although some of the mechanised aids that can be seen in other coal merchants' yards managed to pass me by. Much of our coal is delivered by road and tipped into the yard, from where we shovel it onto an elevator - a conveyor belt that lifts the coal onto a lorry where it drops into sacks. The sacks are then weighed and stacked. Coal that we do not keep as stock is collected from the depot weekly, where it drops from overhead hoppers into our sacks. We became the first merchants to have ordered six tons in a week when the depot at Ilkeston first opened and were rewarded by the Coal Board with drinks of champagne! However, I have noticed that our trips to the depot, although still frequent, pick up less coal as the years go by, as customer demand continues to fall.

My son Stephen joined the business in 1985. Like his father and grandfather before him, Stephen had not intended to become a coal merchant. After leaving school he went to work manufacturing windows, but was disappointed in the direction this career was taking. He joined me on a temporary basis, and remains with me to this day.

My other son, Richard, took up a career in retailing after leaving school, and managed to stay away from the family business until October 1991, when he returned from an extended trip abroad and joined Stephen and myself to help us through a particularly busy winter. But his stay was brief by Davinson standards: he left the business in August 1999 to join the Prison Service.

I consider myself extremely fortunate to have been able to work with my sons. In the same way as I built up a relationship with my father through working closely with him, I like to believe that I have been able to build relationships with both my sons which perhaps would not have been possible had they left school, found jobs and moved away. It has not always been easy! Although they are twins their characters are very different and differences of opinion could often be explosive!

Stephen has ideas that are different from mine and has very fixed views about running the business on more modern lines. I am resistant to such change just as I found my father resistant to me, and am probably too old and established in my ways to embrace innovations at this late stage - with

the possible exception of using Stephen's mobile phone now I have worked out which way up it goes! I am pleased to see his independence of thought and acknowledge that the days of traditional coal merchants and the use of coal as the domestic fuel of choice are being surpassed by preference for gas central heating with 'coal effect' fires.

Thoughts on Life as a Coal Merchant

When I look back I see that as three generations of reluctant coal merchants we have not done so badly. We have managed to sustain a business for over 78 years that has seen such events as the first man to walk on the moon, a world war, the advent of nuclear power and the dawn of microchip technology. Britain has seen four monarchs, more governments than I care to count, and is now locked in a frenzy of information technology that would have been unimaginable in my father's time.

I wonder what my father would say if he were here now. Would he be impressed that we have maintained the business so long, or would he say that the life of a butcher would have been a better option? Would he have been amazed at how things have moved on or distressed at the decline of the coal trade? Would he tell me that it is time I packed in and enjoyed my retirement, as my wife and sons tell me almost daily?

Do I regret that I stayed so long? No - although my wife would probably disagree! I have had the pleasure of working alongside both my father and my sons, and I wouldn't have missed that for the world. Sometimes it is amazing how an unintended and unplanned route can turn out to be better than the one you originally expected to travel.

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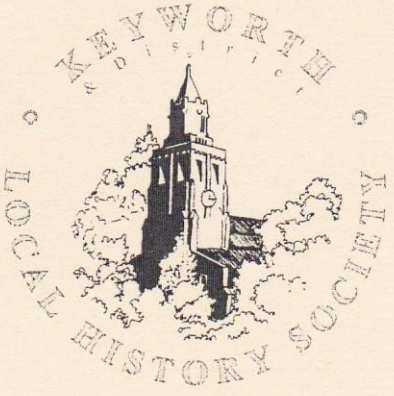

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